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THE MIRROR OF THE CENTURY

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ANTHONY TROLLOPE

(From a drawing by Samuel Lawrence in the possession of Mrs. Anthony Trollope

THE MIRROR OF THE CENTURY

BY

WALTER FREWEN LORD

WITH TWELVE FULL-PAGE PORTRAITS

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DEDICATORY LETTER

DEAR LADY TANKERVILLE,—Estimates of a century, or of a nation's spiritual or mental life reviewed over long periods, have often been attempted, and almost always with poor results. So you may well ask why I should expect you to consider *The Mirror of the Century*.

Certainly if it had nothing to recommend it but my signature it would be little worth; but as a guide to the thoughts of twelve great artists whose work covers the momentous Nineteenth Century, and the part that England has played therein, a study of the Novel in its many aspects, from Jane Austen to Mr. W. E. Norris, may have some small merit.

In the great country of your birth, in so far as we can judge, all the Century is present somewhere within its geographical borders at any given moment. It is not so with us. Much has died: it is astonishing to see how much. In these matters the statistician can help us but little: the artist is by far the better guide.

Even to attempt to pilot a reader through the work of twelve artists is an audacious pretension: and to point the social and political morals to be drawn at each turn of the kaleidoscope almost beyond human endeavour. Nevertheless, the influence of mind on

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matter is so tremendous, so elusive, so terrible, that no effort, however humble, can be altogether vain.

Of all the novelists whose minds have influenced others, the greatest was William Makepeace Thackeray. So great was he that not William Shakespeare himself knew human nature better. Unfortunately his temper was such that Mr. Ruskin's famous "*Poison!*" sums him up not unfairly. After Shakespeare one is glad to be alive: after Thackeray one is horribly ashamed of oneself. That is surely a disheartening result. The satire of Swift is genial and humane by the side of the satire of Thackeray. This man is terrible—nothing mean escapes him. Every folly, every frivolity, every weakness, every moment of forgetfulness, of annoyance, of spite and envy, his eye sees and his consummate art expresses, until one is ashamed of one's race. What an artist! what a commanding intelligence! who shall dare to gainsay his authority?

It may be fanciful; but the lapse of the great middle-class of England from political authority to contented insignificance has appeared to me to be indirectly traceable to Mr. Thackeray's writings. One must believe in oneself: and to reach anything worth having one must aim high. Who could believe in himself (or, for the matter of that, in anybody else?) whose mind was nourished on Thackeray? Who could attempt anything great when Thackeray says: "Forbear! or be ridiculous."

Even a grinning clown is a disconcerting bystander; and a critic who is a man of immense genius and remorseless spite is paralysing. To aim at mediocrity is to sink. The "jealous dulness"[1] of our age—the

[1] I owe this phrase to Mr. D. S. MacColl.

age which left Alfred Stevens to design ironmongery for a living, draws, and not remotely, its inspiration from William Makepeace Thackeray.

The natural antidote to Thackeray was Trollope. Trollope had the settled mind (my own, so I can understand it). He loved things as they were; and loved to make the best of them. He thought that change was in itself a disadvantage; and required justifying. He believed in the middle classes. Consequently he ought to have gained much influence; but he was a man of inferior genius to Thackeray. He was not one to set others on fire; he would have thought such a state of mind indecorous: he disliked enthusiasm.

To return for one moment to the land of your birth: the art of Edgar Allan Poe has always struck me as slightly exotic. Am I right? It is true that his stories were written by an American citizen; but they might have been written by anybody. Or, rather, one would never suspect them of having been written by an American citizen.

In any list of American authors his name must stand high; and his writings form a dramatic contrast with those of—say—Mr. W. D. Howells. These could only have been written by an American citizen; and in my—perhaps insufficiently instructed—opinion, are as great work as any produced in the United States of America; and the most distinctively American.

Now Trollope was an Englishman of the English. He did not like "foreigners": it is to be feared that he did not like Americans. His writings exhibit, in the most marked degree, the qualities which are so conspicuous in all the authors that we are considering: they are so intensely English. In that respect his writings are, perhaps, further away from us than would be expected:

seeing that he has been dead but twenty-five years. Obviously he disapproved of his own creation, the Marquis of Brotherton, who spoke Italian and French so well, and who disdained the ordinary Englishman's ignorance. Trollope thought ignorance appropriate to Englishmen. It is true that the number of British subjects who speak French perfectly is still extremely small: but a very large number of Englishmen do their best; and if they are ashamed it is no longer of trying, but of failing. Many even speak foreign tongues intelligibly; and some agreeably.

In Trollope's novels Englishmen were all politicians about home affairs—which meant the government of the English Counties: foreign politics were the affair, or the diversion, of a few nobles. Nowadays all that is revolutionised. Whig and Tory are hardly more to us than Chain or Plate Armour. Our immense financial interests in foreign countries have, however, made us all foreign politicians.

There is our point, "our immense financial interests." The golden calf is our only Deity. Money was always powerful; but throughout the last century it still had rivals—brains, fashion, birth, and land. Real Estate used to be everything: any lawyer will tell us to-day how greatly it has fallen in importance since Trollope died. That is a very serious factor in the life of our time: it implies the disappearance of an influence that has steadied all English policy since the Wars of the Roses.

As we have reached politics, it remains to be pointed out that the greatest statesman who dealt with modern life through the form of the Novel was Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli foresaw the imperial destiny of the country; and he also foresaw, and furthered,

the immense increase in the power and authority of the Throne. Throughout our recent social history we see a hundred lines of thought, all pointing in the same direction and to the same conclusion. That conclusion is nowhere expressed, but is plain for all folks to see, viz.:—that "the right little, tight little island" of Jane Austen's day has disappeared; and that the England of the twentieth century is now the centre of the greatest military Empire in the world, which we are effectually ruling with an excellent eighteenth-century army.

Never was there a time when England stood more in need of thought; never, surely, was there a time when the mere appearance of an idea caused such general alarm. This is where Disraeli would have helped us. He loved ideas and cherished intellect. "We ought to respect all philosophers even if we disagree with them," he makes his favourite character Sidonia say.

This is the real weakening influence of the worship of the golden calf; not that there is anything disagreeable or discreditable in the money-hunt. On the contrary; money, and a great deal of it, is necessary to a reasonable existence. How much a "great deal" means varies with circumstances. Two pounds a week is comfort to many: two hundred pounds a week no more than comfort to many others. The relentless pursuit of gain, however, not only makes the mind impatient of ideas, but almost disqualifies it for seeing their bearing or even appreciating their existence.

In this Olympian frame of mind, Disraeli dragged his party from the dust and gave it twenty years of power. Precisely because the party has fallen away

from his ideal, it has lost its position at the very moment when that inverted pyramid the British Empire needs its daily attention.

There is a difference, politically, between your class and mine. As an American you will not like that phrase; but as a Countess you can hardly object to it. Lord Tankerville, as a Liberal, will doubt of the right to admit its use, officially at least: but as an Earl he will recognise its propriety. The difference, then, is this, that when we tore power from you in 1832 we were perfectly satisfied to share it with you: recognising that there is much political work which can only be performed by an aristocracy. Now that it is all in your hands you want to keep it all, but cannot, with due care for the interests of the State. There is not enough intelligence in any one class to go round, as we recognised; and a stupid peer (such people exist, if I am rightly informed) is of no more use to the State than a stupid commoner. Disraeli would have held fast to his ideal: he loathed stupidity: above all, he believed in Race.

For many years the conviction has been growing that the future of our expensive race is at the mercy of cheapness. As these lines are being written the last fulfilment of the weird gospel is attained and justified by its ruthless upholders. We began by ruining the land of England: calling the system under which it prospered and fed us, a "feudal survival," or something equally vague and abusive. For thirty years shouts of pagan exultation went up as estate after estate went out of cultivation. "Can we not get cheaper food from abroad?" was the convincing cry of the apostles of cheapness. The inevitable answer

was "We can."[1] Then the manufacturers, the victors in the insane strife, were attacked. "What matter if our manufactures are ruined? Can we not get cheaper manufactured goods from abroad?" "We can."[2] Finally, as a result of attacking alike our land and our manufactures, we find our sons and daughters starving in the streets. "What matter? Can we not get cheaper children from abroad?" "We can."[3]

In the early days of Disraeli, patriotism, once a boast, had already become a reproach. The word is heard to-day without impatience; but what it implies has hardly been recognised; or at least was not recognised until Japan revealed to us its full signification.

The importance of "Race" was a point which Disraeli was never weary of emphasising. The United States of America are, and always have been in this respect, of Disraeli's mind. The "American type" is much considered and cherished. So in our Empire; with a difference. The States fearlessly recruit their population from foreign sources; while Australia, on the contrary, is so jealous of its type that the country is in actual danger of starving it. England is wholly careless of its type; and allows bundles of maladies miscalled human beings to be deposited on her shores with a sentiment which is either callous indifference or superb confidence.

The "Anglo-Saxon type" has thus become an after-dinner phrase; efficacious perhaps, but unconvincing. Charles Kingsley was a dim reincarnation of the soul

[1] But Query, what sort of food?
[2] But Query, what sort of goods?
[3] But Query, what sort of children?

of Sparta: but if we assume (too hastily) that he represents the type, we shall find ourselves corrected by a simple reference to the varieties of the type presented by the great nineteenth-century artists. We begin the century in the world of Jane Austen, before railway trains were invented: and we contemplate a composed world of country life. That world is now fast fading. One recent critic of our social life declares that all that is not parasitical in our country life is decaying. It may be so; but as he wrote as a Chinese, and writes nevertheless very good English (which appears to have been acquired in the United States of America), one is naturally shy of accepting so sweeping a dogmatism. At least in Jane Austen's day it was neither parasitical nor decadent: it was well-nourished, autocephalous, sincere. It dwelt apart and far removed from the metropolis. London was at that time a strange contrast of grandeur and grime. It had not yet become the capital of the world of pleasure; and hardly attempted to rival the fashionable supremacy of Paris. Cobbett did not love the great city; he called it "The Wen." None the less; in spite of Cobbett's depreciation, and in spite of bucolic composure, the mind of England was astir. In the capital, as we can discover in the early novels of Lytton, Byronism ruled supreme: sentimental, indulgent to the Fine Arts—(if somewhat patronisingly and ignorantly indulgent)—romantic and melancholy.

The abiding intellectual life of England was at this time stirring in the provinces, where it is dead to-day except in the Universities. The recklessly high-principled Felix Holt was already a force, while Byronism was declining to its fall. On a large scale Mr. Milbanke and Lord Hainault, the large employers

of labour, were acquiring influence in the country. That influence carried with it the intelligent lower middle classes. People like the Brontës could only look with anger and disgust on the life that Lytton lived. They could not understand its merits; any more than Lytton could understand the merits of the lives led by the Brontës and their like. The lower middle classes, with their ignorant self-sufficiency and their bare and unornamental surroundings, were easy enough subjects for satire. What was missed, however, by the satirists was their sincerity. They were industrious, conscientious; pious, if with an unintelligent piety; and they possessed, besides, what the late Archbishop Benson called "a touch of Torquemada."

Such people—the natural foes of Lytton and their likes—felt sympathetic towards the great manufacturing Liberalism of the middle of the century. Their ranks presently coalesced with those of the upper middle classes. Arnold made Rugby; Oxford was delivered from what the *Times* described as a "dull and incompetent oligarchy." Kingsley (a Cambridge man) was full of humanity.

It is no wonderful thing that a party in the State, so numerous, so serious, and so respectably derived, should have mounted to power. That party was broken in pieces, or rather it committed suicide, in 1885. Its instincts and habits were strongly Liberal, and no observer who was competent to use his eyes could have failed to see that the so-called "Revolution" was something very unlike 1789. Its obvious tendency, and its actual result, was to clothe aristocracy with an authority more complete than privilege could ever have been.

The influence of George Eliot culminated at this

moment. Her art required, for its appreciation, a highly educated and affluent public. That public existed, proceeding from two generations reared in the tradition of culture. Moreover, George Eliot's public must always be affluent, and affluence was at that date the happy condition of the middle classes.

A public that is mentally gratified by a halfpenny daily and a sixpenny monthly has arisen by natural evolution, and it is quite possible that with time that public may develop a taste for literature; but there are no signs of this at present.

Here, then, we take leave of the Nineteenth Century. No student of life can venture to ignore artists so considerate. In Mr. Norris' works we see the latest development, viz., an immense and vigorous society without principles or manners, whole-souledly devoted, from the lowest to the highest, to getting money with both hands and spending it on pleasure. We see a Colonial Empire, as to which we can predict nothing with certainty, except that it is most uncertain if the Colonies will help us in the only way possible—by throwing open their borders to our sons and daughters. We see a military Empire, with an inadequate army, amidst envious nations armed to the teeth. Above all, we see a great race careless of its decadence. The only basis for a modern State is the family based on marriage, and both are alike threatened. Forty years of the Women's Movement—which was to do so much for us—has wrought little but mischief.

To enter on this question is to open a volume of interminable length, and not very pleasant reading. We must needs take official note of its existence, because it is the most salient of all the features of a dying Empire. Decay of marriage, neglect of the

family, alien immigration, decline of the ruling stock, derision of patriotism, confused political and religious ideas, importation of foreign food—we have them all. Whether they are more than symptoms, or already amount to a disease, only the future can tell.

What sources of hope have we? Many: To begin with, we may safely rely on "the sublime instincts of an ancient people." Nations with a thousand years of history behind them do not disappear like things of yesterday.

Let us hear what a poet said of our great national danger—disunion:—

> "Not that the earth is changing, O my God!
> Nor that the seasons totter in their walk,—
> Not that the virulent ill of act and talk
> Seethes ever as a wine-press ever trod,—
> Not therefore are we certain that the rod
> Weighs in Thine hand to smite Thy world; though now
> Beneath Thine hand so many nations bow,
> So many kings:—not therefore, O my God!—
>
> But because Man is parcelled out in men
> To-day; because, for any wrongful blow
> No man not stricken asks, 'I would be told
> Why thou dost thus'; but his heart whispers then,
> 'He is he, I am I.' By this we know
> That our earth falls asunder, being old."

So wrote Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the poet. Now let us hear the man of action. "What we are suffering from," said Mr. Will. Crooks at the Crystal Palace, 23rd August 1905, "is a want of trust in each other. If you see a squire or a rector playing cricket with the village lads in the old-fashioned way, what do you hear nowadays? 'Oh, 'e's on the make, 'e is; wonder wot 'e's arter?' . . . Let people leave off talking to

working men about their power. What you want to talk to them about is their responsibility."—*Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, 24th August 1905.

I do not know how Mr. Crooks votes in the House; and it does not much signify, so long as he talks like this to audiences outside. That is the fine note, the manly note, the note that calls to the harmony beloved and preached by the Galilæan.

So long as the still silent depths of the nation's life run clear and strong, we shall suffer little from the "virulent ill of act and talk," which is hardly more than the scum on the surface. Like the late Edmund J. Phelps, "I believe in God and the Anglo-Saxon race." But I do not believe in an uneducated race: still less did he, being an American. Even Oliver Cromwell, among other recommendations, told his men to keep their powder dry.

One—perhaps the natural—result of the kaleidoscopic changes through which the mind of the Nineteenth Century has passed is that the mind of the Twentieth Century has not found itself. One would hardly dare to use that expression to any one who took the purely English point of view. Englishmen, till lately at least, did not believe in cherishing and guiding the mental process. They would have been downright affronted at being called intelligent. Does not an Englishman's common sense suffice for all things on all occasions? It may have done so once upon a time; although it may be reasoned that not so much the Englishman's strength as his assailant's weakness was the secret of his success. It is quite certain, however, that "gumption," to use the favourite term of the mid-century, will not go far to-day.

When all is said and done, the ordinary Englishman's mind is extraordinarily vigorous: in spite, or

in consequence of its training? Mr. Gladstone, in a noble phrase, once called Oxford and Cambridge "the two eyes of England": long may they retain their eyesight unimpaired! Sir Christopher Mowbray, eighty years ago, declined to believe in the existence of the University of London. What would he have said to the University of Sheffield? Yet it is here and in the sister Universities that the mind of England is being moulded, and moulded under our eyes. These great sources of strength to the country are the work of the last quarter of the last century. To their work even party politics are ancillary in interest. With the exception of a somewhat trifling reference to Owens College in *Endymion*, we should not gather from the fiction of the nineteenth century that "these places" existed. Yet Nottingham and Bristol are to come, and more soon, perhaps: it is a wonderful outburst, almost without parallel in history.

"I do not know if you have any illusions left on the subject of education," says Mr. Shaw to his friend Mr. Walkley: "I have none." That seems strange. I should have thought that a nation's actions, like an individual's actions, depended on the mind which guided them.

The spectacle of the unfolding of the mind of the twentieth century will be of the most absorbing interest. The miserable reflection is that one cannot by any possibility live through more than half of it. Let us hope that when our time comes we shall be tired enough to fall asleep without a regret.

Believe me,

Yours Sincerely,

W. F. LORD.

QUEEN ANNE'S MANSIONS,
New Year's Eve, 1905.

The Author's acknowledgments are due to the Editor of the "Nineteenth Century and After," by whose courtesy the papers which appeared in that Review are included in this volume.

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PORTRAITS

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From a Portrait in the possession of the Dowager-Countess of Lytton, photographed specially for "The Bookman."

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THE MIRROR OF THE CENTURY

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GEORGE ELIOT

THE art of George Eliot dominates the world of romance as the dome of St. Paul's dominates the city of London. Twenty years ago it would have been unnecessary to say so. This woman with the man's name was acclaimed for the genius that she was. Some few pretended that they knew her work for a woman's, even before the pseudonym was divulged. As soon as the facts were known it became "obvious" to the detractor that "George Eliot" was a woman. But in fact the art of George Eliot is so great that the question whether it is a man's art or not is immaterial even if it could be answered.

Let us, for a moment, lay her work side by side with that of the other lady novelists of the century, the earnest, scolding Charlotte Brontë, the demure and exquisite Jane Austen. George Eliot's work towers over theirs like a cathedral over a cottage. The more that we know of it the greater the impression that it makes. Reynolds confessed that it was six months before he could conscientiously say that he admired Raphael. The art of George Eliot is not so mysteriously great as that; but let any of those who to-day

so lightly confess that they find George Eliot tedious, consider how tedious Reynolds must have found Raphael during those six months of patient study.

If the inspiration of Thackeray was mockery, and of Dickens love, what shall we say was the inspiration of George Eliot? Shall we say scientific inquiry? We find in her work no passionate declamation, no angry denunciation, no bitterness. In fact there can be no greater proof of her genius than that from such an unpromising method such great effects proceeded. The dreary and impossible people, philosophers self-styled, who have so often told us all about life and man and woman and conduct, have nothing in common with the great novelist. George Eliot never plunged into that morass. For ever learning, studying, observing, she seems to have put into practice the injunction, "Accumulate facts for ten years before you generalise." Her genius matured late; and the wealth and profusion of its fruit was the outcome of her stupendous labours and the most surprising result of her hideously unpromising method.

How often since that ghastly melodrama the French Revolution have we been assured of the essential equality of man. How often have we been called upon with oaths and curses to believe that people who lead narrow lives are more "genuine" or "interesting" or heaven knows what than those who dwell in castles and fare sumptuously. How lamentably have all these ignorant declaimers failed: their absurdities remain unclothed with the smallest rag of verisimilitude. One must have gone through life with eyes and ears closed, one must have remained unmoved by the faintest whisper of the voice proclaimed in Galilee as Divine, not to see that these

GEORGE ELIOT

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noisy failures have fumbled with the letter of the law while George Eliot has rejoiced in the Spirit.

"That fellow down at Groby is a brute," said Mr. Furnival in Orley Farm. "Is he?" said Mr. Chaffanbrass; "we'll put him in the box and make him say so." Mr. Chaffanbrass was, in his way, an artist; and George Eliot, moralising (though no professed moralist), teaching (though no self-styled teacher), and preaching (though a novelist only), makes her characters tell what tale they will. She does not deafen us with assurances that Adam Bede was as interesting a person as Arthur Donnithorne; but she takes that line of exquisite tenderness—

"The short and simple annals of the poor,"

and, like Mozart, from a gentle aria, evokes tempests.

It is not so long since a convict-ship lay in the Thames: one might inspect it for a trifling fee. Perhaps it was the very ship that carried Hetty overseas. This, or some ship like this, was the tomb of Hetty's love and youth. Were we mortals, then, so rich in joy and tenderness that we could afford to treat our dearest treasures like the squalid rubbish of an eating-house?

The story of *Adam Bede* is well known. It might be called "Story of the Wicked Squire and the Daughter of the People," and is perfectly conventional in outline. George Eliot's work is great art by reason of the simplicity of her subjects, the grandeur of the scale on which the work is executed, and the wonderful wealth and accuracy of detail with which it is decorated. Dialect, which has grown to be first a disfigurement and then a nuisance, was neither one nor the other in her hands. She, and

almost she alone, could handle with skill and effect the tiresome provincialisms, the mispronunciations and the freaks of language in which too many people seek to mask the tediousness of their stories, and which are so often accepted as adequate substitutes for skilled narrative. As to whether it is accurate or not, the inquiry has always appeared to me entirely vain. To be correctly wrong is no great ambition. The point is that she could handle the jargon, as she could handle everything else, with ease and effect. Not Stevens himself was a greater decorative artist.

In placing her story in the days of the Great War, George Eliot laid on herself the burden of interpreting a phase of English life that had just passed away at the time when she wrote. No halo of romance as yet encircled the grim tax-burdened years when George the Third was King. Pluralist Rectors, and field-preachers with all the volubility and none of the fire of George Whitefield, represented, in the Church, Order and Revolt. It pleased George Eliot to give us the best of both. No seeking for squalor under the pretence of Art commended itself to her; and in portraying Mr. Irwine the Rector and Dinah Morris the Preacher, George Eliot has explained what the Duke of Wellington meant when he said that the Church of England had made the English people. She has also made it clear why the English people loved even the church of Bute Crawley, and how those of us who loved it not found better guides than Stiggins and Chadband. She sought the Spirit, and was not to be led astray by the letter. Of the days of Adam Bede she has herself written with regretful reminiscence:—

"Surely all other leisure is hurry compared with a sunny walk through the fields from 'afternoon church,'—as such walks used to be in those old leisurely times, when the boat, gliding sleepily along the canal, was the newest locomotive wonder; when Sunday books had most of them old brown-leather covers, and opened with remarkable precision always in one place. Leisure is gone—gone where the spinning-wheels are gone, and the pack-horses, and the slow waggons, and the pedlars, who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons. Ingenious philosophers tell you, perhaps, that the great work of the steam engine is to create leisure for mankind. Do not believe them: it only creates vacuum for eager thought to rush in. Even idleness is eager now—eager for amusement: prone to excursion-trains, art-museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels: prone even to scientific theorising, and cursory peeps through microscopes. Old Leisure was quite a different personage: he only read one newspaper, innocent of leaders, and was free from that periodicity of sensations which we call post-time. He was a contemplative, rather stout old gentleman, of excellent digestion,—of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis: happy in his inability to know the causes of things—preferring the things themselves. He lived chiefly in the country, among pleasant seats and homesteads, and was fond of sauntering by the fruit-tree wall, and scenting the apricots when they were warmed by the morning sunshine, or of sheltering himself under the orchard boughs at noon, when the summer pears were falling. He knew nothing of week-day services, and thought none the worse of the Sunday sermon if it

allowed him to sleep from the text to the blessing—liking the afternoon service best, because the prayers were the shortest, and not ashamed to say so; for he had an easy, jolly conscience, broad-backed like himself, and able to carry a great deal of beer or port wine—not being made squeamish by doubts and qualms and lofty aspirations. Life was not a task to him, but a sinecure; he fingered the guineas in his pocket, and ate his dinners, and slept the sleep of the irresponsible; for had he not kept up his charter by going to church on the Sunday afternoons?

"Fine old Leisure! Do not be severe upon him, and judge him by our modern standard: he never went to Exeter Hall, or heard a popular preacher, or read *Tracts for the Times* or *Sartor Resartus*."

"Our modern standard,"—the standard of fifty years ago,—seems delightfully leisurely and easy-going to us of the twentieth century. As touching the view of religious duties here set forth, it is not ten years since, in a town not twenty miles from London, I was privileged to catch a glimpse of the other side of the medal. On asking for the keys of the church, the tradesman of whom I inquired received me with disfavour. "There's the Vicarage," he remarked severely; "I don't know whether the Vicar will let you in; it's not as if there was service, or anything, going on. We're not like other places here, I can tell you, sir; you can't go in when you like. But there's the Vicarage: you can try." I did not molest the Erastian in his lair; but I thought of Mr. Irwine; and could not but be grateful that so great a genius as George Eliot had elected to tell us

of what was happy and tranquillising in the church of our grandfathers' time rather than of what was distressing and narrow.

Adam Bede was an early work; and although it does not show George Eliot in the plenitude of her powers handling all human nature with the ease of a consummate master, it represents, nevertheless, a very high level of attainment. Perhaps it would be not unfair to say that of all her characters in this novel Mrs. Poyser is best remembered. She belongs to the class that Ruskin described as "the sweepings of a Pentonville omnibus": he was referring to the Tullivers and the Gleggs, whom he thought debasing studies for youth. Mr. Ruskin preferred the characters in Scott's novels as of a more ennobling type. For my own part, "the sweepings of a Pentonville 'bus" have always appeared to be very interesting people; but that may be the result of my political creed. It has been a constant source of diversion to me to observe how much more we crusted old Tories really think (and, as I believe, know) about the People (the capital letter is admittedly important) than the sentimentalists who are for ever prating about them.

Accepting, then, Mrs. Poyser's humble rank in life, and not striving to discount her wisdom because she was poor, we must needs conclude that she was a worthy and witty soul; one of those people whose opinion of oneself would be so valuable—if one could get at it. It would probably be uncomplimentary, but would certainly contain more truth than falsehood. There are few happier, pleasanter studies than this of the Poyser household. So many authors have since attempted the same kind of work that it

is worth while to point out how much of George Eliot's success came from the intangible gift that distinguishes the artist from the beginner. It is easy to observe and to record: the difficulty is to select and to present. The girls' red hands, the farmer's enlarged waist, the housewife's bitter tongue, the crying children, the bare but well-spread table, the sunlight through the windows—there is no difficulty about observing and recording all these things and many others; but we are still a very long way from realising Mrs. Poyser's house. There is all the difference between an inventory and a picture.

The Farm, the Hall, the Rectory: how much of English history is in those three words! All the stuff of Wellington's army is in *Adam Bede*. We have changed somewhat since then: Mulvaney and Learoyd and Ortheris are creatures of a strangely modified world. But if we would know what was the England of Pitt and Castlereagh, what was its strength and what its soul, then *Adam Bede* will help us more than many a page of tabulated statistics.

Middlemarch does for the country town what *Adam Bede* does for the countryside. It is a greater work; and some maintain that it is George Eliot's greatest. In none of her books are the vigour and felicity of her strokes more marked. There is not a name in the book from end to end that does not recall a character fully drawn, however few the touches. Bambridge and Horrock (for example) the horsedealers; whence could the authoress have drawn the knowledge that enabled her to record in so few pages, as on graven steel, these two companions of Fred Vincy's dreary ride to Houndsley. They alighted "at the Red Lion in a street shaded with coal-dust," and dined "in a

room furnished with a dirt-enamelled map of the county, a bad portrait of an anonymous horse in a stable, His Majesty George the Fourth with legs and cravat, and various leaden spittoons." This more than depressing expedition, grimly called "gay," is only one of the innumerable side-pictures of *Middlemarch*, each perfectly drawn and exactly in its place.

It is, perhaps, by entering the great castle of *Middlemarch* through a postern gate, so to speak, that we best realise the secret of its vast impressiveness. If one was asked to say what was the story of *Middlemarch*, one would be puzzled to know what to say. There are twenty stories. As a rule books with many stories in them are tedious; but *Middlemarch* is not tedious. The incidents are commonplace enough, and there is no melodrama. Strictly speaking, the story is mostly concerned with the paltry gossip and jealousies and squabbles of a provincial town; than which nothing can be more hauntingly depressing; yet few books are more exhilarating than *Middlemarch*. It is very long; and that is against a book, as a rule; but *Middlemarch* is not a page too long. Here, then, we have all the elements of a bad book; but it is one of the best books ever written. The perfect mastery of detail, the exquisite execution of every piece of detail, and the rigorous subordination of detail to the outline of the narrative—these may, perhaps, be some of the measures by which George Eliot created a masterpiece out of material that has provided nothing but failure for so many other aspirants. Let us, rather, say not one masterpiece but fifty. Foremost in our memories comes perhaps the Rosamond-Lydgate study.

Rosamond is the "Cat Triumphant." I know not

if Gwendolen Grandcourt was designed as a pendant, or contrast, to the "Rosamond" study; but if Rosamond is the Cat Triumphant, Gwendolen is the Cat Vanquished. One so often hears abuse of Grandcourt that one is tempted to believe that the real significance of that wonderful study in Will Power has been overlooked. Nothing less than the will of Henleigh Grandcourt could dominate the will of Gwendolen Harleth. Lydgate failed in his married life not because he was weak, but because Rosamond was so much too strong—strong in the vigour of her cast-iron vulgarity —that tremendous force in this world.

How few, how very few would have had the patience and self-restraint to draw the picture of this murder of the higher type by the lower. The love that the author bore to all great and noble things must have made the process exquisitely painful to her. Or was the joy of great creation strong enough to bear down the misery of the picture?

R. L. Stevenson has remarked that the "Rosamond" study was a lesson much needed by young gentlemen. It may well be so; they need so many lessons. But surely young gentlemen are the last people to profit by studying Rosamond Vincy—even if they do study her.

It is true that the influence of Rosamond could never have been anything but bad; and yet she is a more interesting study than Mary Garth. Will any one undertake to explain the essential dulness of feminine goodness? This great artist whose ideals were so lofty and whose teaching was so noble has touched her greatest heights in masculine characters. Lydgate is a good man, and Farebrother is a better; Brooke was a gentleman and Cadwalader was a

gentleman and a sportsman. From all these, and from many others—Mr. Thesiger, for instance, who hardly appears, and Sir James Chettam — we get strong and good impressions. But to take once more the oft-quoted last line of *Faust*, it is assuredly not the "eternal feminine" that draws us on and upwards if we take Dorothea or Celia or Mary Garth or Mrs. Garth. Teaching by contrast is good; and assuredly all that Rosamond was should be avoided. Vain, selfish, snobbish, and tyrannical, she stands to all generations the Cat Triumphant; a grim creation, as bad a woman as ever wrecked a man's life.

But when we come to teaching by example, who should teach us if not a woman drawing women. We men are eternally assured that we know nothing about women. So be it. Let us see, then, what a great woman's idea of good women was.

If the "eternal feminine" is to draw us onwards and upwards, presumably it will be by the force of less selfish and more ennobling ideas than any that we wicked men are accustomed to cherish. When we regard the four good women of *Middlemarch*, however, the first thing that strikes us is that they have, one and all, such an uncommonly good eye for the main chance. In fact they give a kind of horrid verisimilitude to a comment I was once privileged to hear: "Women are not progressive. Man is the inventive creature. Take Love, for instance; Man invented Love. Women would never have got further than inventing the settlements."

The remark is hardly witty enough to justify its brutality; but it may serve a useful purpose as an extreme statement of the case. Now there is nothing whatever discreditable in having an eye for the

main chance; although there is certainly something ennobling in the spectacle of a human being playing a gallant part in life, taking chances and scorning profit for the sake of an Idea. That is fine; the mere memory of such a career makes the world better worth living in. Such a career was Lydgate's. That he got into a mess and was much bespattered with abuse was natural enough. That was the inevitable consequence of trying to make things better. The example of his disinterestedness is uplifting: one takes off one's hat to him in silent respect. He was a man; and a good man: he said what he wanted done, tried to get it done, and failed: his miserable surroundings beat him; but there was no taint of self-interest in his failure. Only in their generation the children of this world are wiser than the children of light.

Dorothea is usually cited as the noble feminine, the idealist. Nevertheless it is worth noting that after patronisingly lecturing her little sister on the frivolity of wearing jewels, she did (in point of fact) keep the most valuable for herself. She insisted on marrying a (very wealthy) elderly suitor, much to the discomfort of her people; and again insisted on marrying a penniless nobody who caught her widowed fancy. Moreover, she retained the whole of Mr. Brooke's valuable estate, to the exclusion of her younger sister. Her motives may have been, no doubt were, everything that was creditable in all these transactions; but the results were the same as if she had been an ill-regulated, selfish, and acquisitive young person. Indeed this young idealist gave everybody a great deal of trouble; and her story is chiefly interesting, one would say, as a solemn warning against behaving differently from other people.

There are other good women. There is Mary Garth, a respectable girl with a nasty temper. There is her mother, an admirable housewife. There is Celia. What a labour it would be to talk to any of them! All these are types, vivid and interesting; only one would be bored to meet them. Stay; there is one exception—Mrs. Cadwalader. Courageous, loving, thrifty, and witty, she is not only delightful to read about, but she has not a trace of the dulness of goodness. One has a lurking suspicion, however, that one is not intended to admire Mrs. Cadwalader. George Eliot's mind was too serene and too lofty to allow her to pursue her characters with savage hate. She would hunt down nobody in the fashion of Thackeray hunting down Becky or Beatrix. But she has not chosen to tell us that wit and charm and beauty and kindness are themselves goodness. Would that she had done so! The world would have believed her. Lord Beaconsfield was of this mind; but then nobody pays, or paid, much attention to Lord Beaconsfield's views on such matters: least of all George Eliot; for she was at elaborate pains to champion the cause of the Hebrews (surely a work of supererogation), in apparent oblivion of the fact that her work had already been admirably done by Lord Beaconsfield, who was a Hebrew himself.

A collection of negations, therefore, continues to stand for goodness; and one must needs add a disappointing reflection in addition. For Dorothea has so many exalted professions of faith and conduct, and ends up with a material triumph so definite and commonplace, that one hesitates to apply to her the lofty concluding words of the book: "That things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been,

is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

The unvisited tombs are many: the hidden lives as numerous. Yet there are lives not hidden that are great factors in the beauty of the nation, and greater factors because they are not hidden. Of all the women-portraits of the century, few are more charming than Trollope's Lady George Germaine. Without verbal pretensions of superiority to other people, Mary Battle was really superior, really capable of wider influence than others by reason of her higher vitality. There we have our word, high vitality rules the world for good or evil; and when we have the good in high place, goodness radiates like sunshine, and the desert around blossoms like the rose. Dorothea's vitality was high, but uninformed, ill-regulated, and with patches of petulance. Witness that terrible retort on her sister who wonderingly inquired whether Dorothea would wear the best jewels in public: "Perhaps," she said, rather haughtily, "I cannot tell to what level I may sink." It may be safely affirmed that the influence of the Marchioness of Brotherton (as Mary Germaine became when her husband succeeded, and from being a poor man became a rich man) was worth more to the country than the influence of the whole tribe of incalculable Dorotheas.

It is easy to revolt against the social system. The probable result is that one remains powerless to improve it; it is, perhaps, harder to remain part of the system and to see that one's own part is well done. It is easy to keep the Ten Commandments—that is the beginning of the Law. But it is possible to keep them all, and to remain a cheerless person. In the case of Mr. Bulstrode it becomes clear that it is

possible to keep them all, and even to be a shining religious light, and to be a villain as black as hell. Our typical modern villain cannot be touched by the Law. He is attentive to business, scrupulous in conduct, sanctimonious in speech, a model of all the domestic relations; and he exudes evil as another man will radiate good.

Bulstrode was a banker who had come to Middlemarch as a young man; and was, at the date of the story, well advanced in years. He had made philanthropy and charity a prominent and paying feature of his "connection." He had a gift of extempore prayer and exhortation, and was highly regarded by serious people. By assiduous attention to all business meetings of committees, by acquiring all possible information as to the concerns of his neighbours, he had become a man to be feared. Relentless in business, hard as the nether millstone, he hid a heart as black as ink with so heavy a cloak of propriety that he was unattackable. His pontifical airs made him many enemies; but the enemies dared not speak: they could only curse him in private. If it had not been for the dreadful "what happened before he came to Middlemarch," this man would have gone to his grave in the odour of sanctity; followed, it is true, by the curses of those on whom he had trampled "to the glory of God"; but followed by no outspoken comment that was other than complimentary.

An accident—that incalculable thing even to the correctest man of business—revealed the creature as he was; and this time not, as before, to some poor victim whom he could stifle; but to all the world. The study of the wretched creature at bay is Miltonic in its grandeur and hideousness. Nowhere is the

almost supernatural insight of George Eliot more astonishing. Bulstrode, clinging even to the last to the tattered rags of sanctity that had so long clothed him in ample and dignified folds to the eyes of man, says to his wife (for this vampire had found a mate): "We will make a journey to Cheltenham in the course of a month or two. There are great spiritual advantages to be had in that town along with the air and the waters, and six weeks there will be eminently refreshing to us." He really believed in the spiritual advantages, and meant that his life henceforth should be the more devoted because of those later sins which he represented to himself as hypothetic, praying hypothetically for their pardon: "If I have herein transgressed."

Daniel Deronda is, of all George Eliot's novels, the one most angrily canvassed. Two points have always appeared to me most important; and both are for ever overlooked. The first is that the "Apologia" for the Hebrews had been already done by a Hebrew; and the second is that George Eliot entirely overlooked the work: moreover, it was natural that she should overlook it. Lord Beaconsfield was a man of action; he saw things as they were. He himself lived a life full, sumptuous, intense. If he and George Eliot had anything in common, it was that they both loved intelligence. Where they differed was that Lord Beaconsfield was impatient with stupidity; but George Eliot loved stupidity as she loved everything human. Lord Beaconsfield would no more have occupied himself with a Fred Vincy in his world of art than he would have occupied himself with a Fred Vincy in real life. George Eliot was the more loving, and therefore the greater artist. Surely, then, when we come to a peculiar

piece of work like a vindication of a particular class we should expect George Eliot's work to be the better. But it is hopelessly inferior. With infinite pains, she has achieved a monumental failure. One might offer many wordy explanations of this; but one—the best, the real one—suffices: she was not a Jewess; and nobody ever understood or ever will understand the Jews except the Jews themselves. There are some minds so constituted that they can never get beyond bookwork in mathematics. Such minds may aspire for ever to Wrangler's rank; but they will never attain a higher position than that of a Junior Op. In all matters of Judaism Lord Beaconsfield was Senior Wrangler: George Eliot never got beyond bookwork. This is natural; for Benjamin Disraeli was not only a Jew, but a great Jew. It was said of one great man that he "thought in continents": Lord Beaconsfield thought in centuries—in Jewish matters at least. My Roman Catholic friends take exception to his phrase, "The Church of Rome was founded by a Hebrew, and the magnetic influence still lingers." The thought is offered as an explanation of the predominance of Rome in the religious world; and, if fanciful, is at least practical. Nor is it apparent why the idea should be repugnant. Not only was Peter undoubtedly a Hebrew, but the Redeemer Himself was a Hebrew; and whatever doubts there may be about the magnetic influence in the one case, there can be none whatever in the other. The phrase may be taken as one of many that illustrate Lord Beaconsfield's large grasp of things; he was impatient of trifles in large matters. Now that is exactly where the patient analytical method of George Eliot fails. That method, which in other directions has achieved such wonderful success,

wholly failed her when she took in hand the Jewish question. If one may say so, she was herself another Casaubon; thinking to illuminate these vast and complicated questions by the aid of a careful analysis of a petty pawnbroker's mind. But that is hopeless! An insignificant Jew is no more interesting than an insignificant Christian. Whatever contribution the man's religion may make, in either case, to his character, his religion is the child of centuries. The tiresome Cohens and Lapidoths are of no more help to us than the "Thoth and Dagon" learning of Mr. Casaubon could have been to real Orientalists.

It is worth while to inquire how George Eliot came to ignore the work of Benjamin Disraeli. We cannot know for certain; but it may be surmised that his political opinions were abhorrent to her. Then his way of looking at life was very different from hers. The gay and gallant German officers whose blue and silver and jingling spurs and grand manners make garrison towns so bright and interesting were to her only "unproductive citizens." We all have our limitations; and that was hers: the glitter and pomp of life was not what she cared for. Of course it is commonplace to point out that to Lord Beaconsfield the outward and visible signs of intense and successful life were very dear. Thus we have a man whom many Englishmen regarded with terror and loathing—especially the Englishmen of that school of political and social thought which George Eliot regarded as sound and progressive. In George Eliot's case the dislike was probably so strong that it prevented even so sane an artist as herself from even taking note of his labours. As a result we have her Casaubon-like fumblings in *Daniel Deronda*. The prose is

sound and the sentiments are worthy; but the effect is naught.

If we eliminate Deronda and his pawnbroker friends, his tedious little wife, and the melancholy Mordecai, we find ourselves face to face with very great work. It has often been affirmed that Grandcourt is "unreal," "impossible," and many other inartistic things. Yet he remains, nevertheless, a wonderful study in will-power; and the people who deem him "impossible" have not, it is submitted, studied the power of the will of man. That is, in effect, what the "Grandcourt" story comes to: a study in Will. We have so many portraits of this strong, handsome, self-willed man, that they amount to an embarrassment. But of all of them this is the finest: "Grandcourt, who drank little wine, had left the table, and was lounging, while he smoked, in an easy-chair near the hearth, where a fire of oak-boughs was gaping to its glowing depths, and edging them with a delicate tint of ashes delightful to behold. The chair of red-brown velvet brocade was a becoming background for his pale-tinted, well-cut features and exquisite long hands; omitting the cigar, you might have imagined him a portrait by Moroni, who would have rendered wonderfully the impenetrable gaze and air of distinction; and a portrait by that great master would have been quite as lively a companion as Grandcourt was disposed to be." The only exception that can be taken to this is that George Eliot herself was as great an artist as the Italian, and that the Grandcourt of her creation is greater than any "Senator" or "Gentleman" of Moroni. If we would realise this, let us but consider Gwendolen, who is Rosamond "to a higher power," and armed with more numerous and more

deadly weapons than the Middlemarch beauty of the *haute bourgeoisie*. Here is a creature strong in her woman's strength, selfish, resolute, accomplished, and witty; and she is as crumpled paper in the steely grasp of Grandcourt. By a device, somewhat strained but not wholly unfair, the great artist has made all the "goodness" of Gwendolen escape the tyranny of her husband. We are told, over and over again, that there was a "something" in Gwendolen that her husband partially failed to enslave; and failed altogether to extinguish. That "something" was wholly good; and in that conclusion there reside three queries, each implying the most attractive speculations. The first is, what persuaded George Eliot, in this case, to preach that good and evil lie in patches in our natures and can be secured whole, one patch all good, another all evil? The second is, why—assuming that definition of the "Grandcourt" study to be sound—did none of the Gwendolen "goodness" overflow into her relations with Grandcourt? Surely, for a girl who loved material good so dearly, the balance could not have been hard to strike, when she contemplated all that Grandcourt had given her. A house in Grosvenor Square; two country places—one historical; a box at the opera; an exquisite yacht; a string of hunters—these things are worth "thank you" and more; especially when we contemplate the squalid alternative from which Grandcourt's generosity delivered her. Some natures there are in whom it is no falsehood to say, "I do not like diamonds"—"I prefer beer to champagne": these natures are to be felicitated; their aridity answers to the wilderness in which our lives are mostly passed: they are everywhere at home. If mere ease of transition be all that we long for in this life, the ideal of

nourishment and clothing would be grass-and-water, and a sun-dried skin. But Gwendolen was not of this type. She had all the tastes that exist. We can no more help our tastes than we can help our features; and every taste that is not gratified is a mortification.

Consequently when we read of Gwendolen's agony of self-examination and self-blame, we are tempted to conclude—not indeed that George Eliot's diagnosis was faulty (that would be too presumptuous), but that sympathy was legitimately due to Grandcourt.

Remains a problem: granted that marriage evoked all that was good in Gwendolen, and that all the goodness in her revolted against her husband, how comes it that this mass of noble ideas and aspirations centres round the figure of Deronda? We can escape from that problem by concluding that "there is no accounting for tastes." Remains a corollary: granted the potentiality of this noble revolt, how comes it that so many sublime impulses remained in abeyance while the choice was being made? Remains a second corollary: if these impulses were so feeble that they died away before the prospect of embracing an honest though squalid career, how came they to gather strength such as enabled them to triumph over a house in Grosvenor Square?

In fact there is no end to the charm of the Gwendolen Grandcourt story. The highest tribute that an Englishman can offer to any piece of literary art is to call it Shakespearean. This magniloquent adjective is so grievously misused that I hesitate to describe this part of *Daniel Deronda* as Shakespearean. Yet if it is not Shakespearean I do not know what is. Everything else in the book is dwarfed by the side of it. It

may be fanciful, but it has always seemed to me as if the force of these creations had been for George Eliot a kind of Fiery Chariot. When she is in that chariot, her own creation, it seems as if all things were different. The kindly Meyrick family would, in any other contrast, appear as considerable characters. Sir Hugo Mallinger, a more virile and distinguished Mr. Brooke, attracts. Lush is a macabresque study of much finish; even Mr. Vandernoodt, we feel, ought to be interesting. But how do all these people shrink into insignificance when Grandcourt appears; or when Gwendolen appears. The tiniest particular in the lives of either seems clothed with force and charm. Take this passage, trifling enough: "He lingered over his toilet, and certainly came down with a faded aspect of perfect distinction which made fresh complexions, and hands with the blood in them, seem signs of raw vulgarity." What felicity! what pungency! and all for no profounder purpose than that of telling us how Grandcourt looked when he occupied himself with being indifferent to everybody and everything around him.

Compare this with a sight of Gwendolen at a moment when Daniel the Paralyser came across her path:—

"'Then tell me what better I can do,' said Gwendolen insistently.

"'Many things. Look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action—something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot.'

"For an instant or two Gwendolen was mute. Then again moving her brow from the glass, she said—

"'You mean that I am selfish and ignorant.'

"He met her fixed look in silence before he answered firmly—

"'You will not go on being selfish and ignorant.'"

To parody, if one may, Sir Edward Hamley, it seems a doubtful privilege to encounter a lover who goes on in this way.

In *Daniel Deronda* there is a charm which many do not feel. The attraction of its language is not powerful enough to conquer a (very natural) sense of tedium that invades us in the Cohen-Pash-Lapidoth scenes. Mordecai, in addressing his father, says: "We will share our food with you—you shall have a bed, and clothing. We will do this duty to you because you are our father. But you will never be trusted. You are an evil man: you made the misery of our mother. That such a man is our father is a brand on our flesh which will not cease smarting. But the Eternal has laid it upon us; and though human justice were to flog you for your crimes, and your body fall helpless before the public scorn, we would still say, 'This is our father; make way, that we may carry him out of your sight.'" This is noble, and I doubt not, faithful. But we read it unmoved; the impression remains that in seeking to interpret the Jewish temper and Jewish ideals George Eliot set herself a task that was beyond her. If some Jew scholar would tell us, from his point of view, how it came about that the Hebrews, politically insignificant as they were, should have forced their moral and religious conceptions on the world, that would be a great work indeed. Why Jehovah should have

conquered Melkarth and Baal and Olympus itself; why Tyre and Sidon, Parthia and Persia, Assyria and Egypt remain antiquarian studies imperfectly assimilated, while little Judæa has become the lodestar of countless myriads—we know the Christian explanation of this, but what is the Jew's point of view?

For a Christian to attempt to project himself into the Hebrew mind is, one may say, impossible: the two remain incommensurable quantities. Not that feats apparently still more daring have not been achieved; as when Tennyson imagined Tithonus; but this particular feat has, so far at least, proved to be beyond human power. A less difficult task was that of creating the Florence of Savonarola, of Macchiavelli, and the young Michel Angelo; and this, though very difficult, George Eliot achieved. I have heard it contended that the Florentines of *Romola* were not real Florentines. It may be so; although when one recalls the grateful inscription on Mrs. Browning's house in Florence recording that her labours had bound together Italy and England with a link of gold, one is disposed to conclude that where Mrs. Browning succeeded, George Eliot could not fail. Whether Florentines or not, they are, however, perfectly human; and one dwells among them with delight as among friends and neighbours.

Tito Melema is the wicked character of the story; and when we remember the wicked Grandcourt and the wicked Arthur Donnithorne, we are tempted to think that there may be something in the charge so often made against this great artist that she really had a bias against men as men. Yet the charge refutes itself; it cannot stand in the light of full study. Nothing is quainter than to balance the villain Bulstrode

the Banker with Tito the Greek. Bulstrode exuded evil, though his behaviour was scrupulously correct. Tito did not exude evil, although he was a wicked young man. On the contrary, he was a source of happiness to a great many people. His sham wife, for example, was perfectly happy in his company, and he was a charming father. Everybody who met him liked him, and when we consider the very considerable stress under which his virtue gave way, it must be admitted that fortune was not kind to him. His real wife Romola was a trial. She is another, and perhaps the most distinguished, member of the great company of "good women" who are but bundles of negatives. Like Rachel Castlewood, she kept all the Ten Commandments because she was under no temptation to break them. But when we come to minor indulgences in evil, when Rachel Castlewood, *e.g.*, heard the priest say,

"From Envy, Hatred, Malice, and all Uncharitableness,"

was there perchance any reflection before she said,

"Good Lord, deliver us,"

or was the response purely mechanical?

Romola had more to forgive than Rachel. For after all Frank Castlewood must have been bored to death, and yet there was nothing against him except that he was intemperate and extravagant, while his wife, with all her airs of wisdom, was a perfect booby in her relations with Mohun. Romola really had much to forgive. Tessa and the "person at Hexton" may balance each other, and Tito was perfectly temperate. But then he really was a rascal; and his being an engaging rascal only made things

worse when he came to selling poor old Bardo's library.

It is in vain that detractors will have none of *Romola;* they remain detractors and convert nobody. We can talk of the supper in the Rucellai Gardens as if we had been there ourselves. Dolfo Spini is perfectly familiar to us; we actually know Savonarola better than our parish priest. Romola herself has passed into the language as a type. A good woman? yes. A noble woman? yes. But like all these good people, so deplorably helpless. If we consider the reality and extent of women's influence in the affairs of this life, does it not seem, again, pitiable that so great an artist should have chosen to present her highest types as at the best suffering martyrs? Moreover, if the best women are only Dorotheas and Romolas, what would become of the influence of women? That great fact, admirable or regrettable according to the point of view, but still a great fact, remains unintelligible, if it is to be referred merely to will-power so vacillating. So tiny and wandering a stream cannot furrow the plain of life as we know that it is seamed and furrowed by the will of woman.

Much was formerly said of the eccentricity of George Eliot's style, of its tendency to obscurity and "preciousness." In reading her books after a lapse of twenty years, one is agreeably surprised at their remarkable self-restraint. As an illustration, let us take this passage: "The fretted summer shade, and stillness, and the gentle breathing of some loved life near—it would be paradise to us all, if eager thought, the strong angel with the implacable brow, had not long since closed the gates." For an artist who can handle English so skilfully, the temptation to indulge

must have been considerable. But George Eliot seems to have exercised a kind of censorship over her own writings. Passages like this are not common, and when they appear they are in place. Sometimes they enforce gentle reflections and sometimes lofty thoughts, as in the noble figure indicating the life of Savonarola. "It was the fashion of old, when an ox was led out for sacrifice to Jupiter, to chalk the dark spots, and give the offering a false show of unblemished whiteness. Let us fling away the chalk, and boldly say—the victim is spotted, but it is not therefore in vain that his mighty heart is laid on the altar of man's highest hopes."

If one were to seek for a single word—not a complimentary word—for the art of George Eliot, one might call it "introspective." Certainly the atmosphere was grey with introspection in the years in which she wrote. Nevertheless, even in this dim half-light some beauties are revealed. "Tito was really kinder than she was, better tempered, less proud and resentful; he had no angry retorts, he met all complaints with perfect sweetness, he only escaped as quietly as he could from things that were unpleasant. It belongs to every large nature, when it is not under the immediate power of some strong unquestioning emotion, to suspect itself, and doubt the truth of its own impressions, conscious of possibilities beyond its own horizon." Maggie Tulliver, we may recollect, was much given to recalling what she had done, and usually thought that she might have done differently and better; whereas Tom was always sure that he would have done the same thing in the same way, and that it had been the right thing to do.

There is no easier way of filling a page than by "describing scenery." George Eliot was sparing of this easy and plausible material. If a description had to be made, no one could do the work better. "The hill was sparsely inhabited, and covered chiefly by gardens; but in one spot was a piece of rough ground jagged with great stones, which had never been cultivated since a landslip had ruined some houses there towards the end of the thirteenth century. Just above the edge of this broken ground stood a queer little square building, looking like a truncated tower roofed in with fluted tiles, and close by was a small outhouse, apparently built up against a piece of ruined stone wall. Under a large half-dead mulberry tree that was now sending its last fluttering leaves in at the open doorways, a shrivelled, hardy old woman was untying a goat with two kids. . . ." There is the picture; and the picture being necessary, the artist gives it to us; but we are not called upon to admire picture after picture until our attention is fatigued with a series of exhibitions of the artist's skill.

In mental as in natural scenery the "not too much" — that most difficult of achievements — is a constant delight. When Tito's rascality became public news, what more felicitous presentment of the change of opinion to his disadvantage could be desired than the short scene in the council chamber. "Among the twenty Florentines who bent their grave eyes on Tito, as he stood gracefully before them, speaking of startling things with easy periphrasis, and with that apparently unaffected admission of being actuated by motives short of the highest, which is often the intensest affectation, there were several

whose minds were not too entirely preoccupied to pass a new judgment on him in these new circumstances; they silently concluded that the ingenious and serviceable Greek was in future rather to be used for public needs than for private intimacies."

Romola is in a high key; and is almost wholly tragic, for Monna Brigida affords but slight "comic relief." The much more popular *Mill on the Floss* is a very different book. Tragic in its finale, and scored throughout with deep veins of sadness, it is nevertheless full of passages of exquisite tenderness and charm such as are not to be found anywhere else in the great world of English romance. The child-life of Tom and Maggie is almost miraculously good. It is to be noted, however, that when these children grow up, the gloom grows deeper and deeper, until we find ourselves in the midst of a carnival of sorrow. In fact, looking back on the beginning of the book from the end we contemplate a hell's brew of misery. In this book, again, we find the higher type is crushed by the lower. Here again, goodness is shown to be helpless, miserable, feeble; the beautiful nature goes under. Despair and wretchedness hunt the unhappy Maggie year after year till her tragic death comes as a relief from the intolerable pain of looking on at such injustice. That the art is consummate only adds to our unhappiness; that each situation in turn is convincing only redoubles our fury at the prolonged tortures of so exquisite a subject. How could George Eliot have endured to write the *Mill on the Floss?*

Just as tedious talkers can never have enough of the weather, so incompetent romancers weary us now with costume, now with scenery. Costume has ceased

to be legitimate "padding," almost since the days when the young Disraeli satirised *Von Chronicle;* but scenery remains a tedious interlude in too many stories. Not, however, in the *Mill on the Floss.* There is not much; but what there is, is charming; and is touched with tender thought. At the end of his first half-year at Mr. Stelling's Tom came home, and the Christmas was white and good and hard and clear. "Snow lay on the croft and river-bank in undulations softer than the limbs of infancy; it lay with the neatliest finished border on every sloping roof, making the dark-red gables stand out with a new depth of colour; it weighed heavily on the laurels and fir-trees, till it fell from them with a shuddering sound; it clothed the rough turnip-field with whiteness, and made the sheep look like dark blotches; the gates were all blocked up with the sloping drifts, and here and there a disregarded four-footed beast stood as if petrified 'in unrecumbent sadness'; there was no gleam, no shadow, for the heavens, too, were one still, pale cloud — no sound or motion in anything but the dark river that flowed and moaned like an unresting sorrow. But old Christmas smiled as he laid this cruel-seeming spell on the outdoor world, for he meant to light up home with new brightness, to deepen all the richness of indoor colour, and give a keener edge of delight to the warm fragrance of food: he meant to prepare a sweet imprisonment that would strengthen the primitive fellowship of kindred, and make the sunshine of familiar human faces as welcome as the hidden day-star. His kindness fell but hardly on the homeless—fell but hardly on the homes where the hearth was not very warm, and where the food had little fragrance; where the

human faces had no sunshine in them, but rather the leaden, black-eyed gaze of unexpectant want. But the fine old season meant well; and if he has not learnt the secret how to bless men impartially, it is because his father Time, with ever-relenting purpose, still hides that secret in his own mighty slow-beating heart."

If all descriptions of scenery could be kept on this level, we could not have too much of them. Meantime a problem presents itself. Here we have a great artist whose every stroke betokens Love — love of her country, love of her kind, love of all that may be loved. Yet when we come to the great passion itself, we are never allowed to see it except in tatters. How is this? Why are Philip, Stephen, and even Tom (whose brotherly love was genuine, if narrow) all left desolate? Why is Maggie herself offered up as a burnt sacrifice on the altar of all that makes life hideous? Love is sometimes happy: one has even heard of happy marriages; yet the only people to whom George Eliot will allow these blessings to come are those who have the narrowest conceptions of their meaning.

> "Wretched lovers, Fate hath passed
> This stern decree, no joy shall last,"

is a hard enough saying; but George Eliot's is a harder: "There is no joy," wails this Solomon Eagle, accompanying her wail with orchestral music of such beauty and grandeur that we are swept away as on a flood of sombre sensations. There is no joy, that is, for those who are most sensible of joy.

> "Quanto la cosa è più perfetta
> Più senta' l bene e così la doglienza."

No doubt; but the perfect thing does, in point of fact, feel the good; and sometimes good comes. Why would not George Eliot tell of the goodness and happiness of intense natures? Why always teach by contrast? Why tell us that the "sweepings of a Pentonville 'Bus" are happy, and easily happy (as they are, blessings on them), but that nobler, keener souls are doomed to misery? This is sorry preaching; and inasmuch as thought does most momentously tell on Life, this mighty Pessimist must surely have added to the sum of human Woe.

If we leave George Eliot's teaching out of account, and think only of her art, we shall be hard put to find a single page of the *Mill on the Floss* that may not be quoted with delight. It is the evenest of all her books, and perhaps is only second to *Middlemarch*. One sometimes wonders whether she really cared for animals; but whether she loved them or not, she observed them as keenly as if they had been human; and, surely, this is a perfect picture: "Minny, who had entrenched himself, trembling, in his basket as soon as the music began, found this thunder so little to his taste that he leaped out and scampered under the remotest chiffonière, as the most eligible place in which a small dog could await the crack of doom." And this: "That honest waggoner is thinking of his dinner getting sadly dry in the oven at this late hour; but he will not touch it till he has fed his horses—the strong, submissive, meek-eyed beasts, who, I fancy, are looking mild reproach at him from between their blinkers, that he should crack his whip at them in that awful manner, as if they needed that hint! See how they stretch their shoulders up the slope towards the bridge, with all the more energy because they are so

near home. Look at their grand shaggy feet that seem to grasp the firm earth; at the patient strength of their necks, bowed under the heavy collar; at the mighty muscles of their struggling haunches! I should like well to hear them neigh over their hardly earned feed of corn, and see them with their moist necks freed from the harness, dipping their eager nostrils in the muddy pond. Now they are on the bridge, and down they go again at a swifter pace, and the arch of the covered waggon disappears at the turning behind the trees."

So much has been said of the charm of *Silas Marner* that the slight and somewhat mechanical story comes as a surprise. If anybody but George Eliot had written it, *Silas Marner* would be admitted to be quite remarkable, full of promise; and foremost among its attractions comes the marked ability with which the eighteenth-century life is reconstructed for us. The home of Squire Cass, a typical small country gentleman, is clear, picturesque, vital. "Imagination," wrote George Eliot herself, "is not false outward vision, but intense inward representation." The compiler of statistics may tell us what small squires drank, and how many servants they were accustomed to keep; but if we would know what the country gentleman of narrow means was like, and how he lived, we have a far better road to knowledge in the imaginative work *Silas Marner* than in any statistician or historian. Perhaps his speech was coarser than George Eliot has cared to record; we can go to Smollett for these sordid details. The rest of the book, however, is not George Eliot's best work. The melodrama of Dunsey's disappearance, as well as the robbery itself, seem mechanical. They have the

same look of careful contrivance as the undesired encounters in *Romola*. In fact, it is when we deal with work either immature or executed with fatigued attention that we discover what we may fairly claim —if we care to do so—as a limitation to George Eliot's genius. The construction of exciting plots was clearly not a strong point with her. One notices the weakness of the plot the more in *Silas Marner*, in that the characters themselves are less interesting than usual. The heroine is quite colourless. Moreover, our attention is called to the plot because there is no obvious moralising in the book. No controversial position, such as that it is good to be poor and bad to be wealthy, distracts our mind from the current of the narrative; which flows, indeed, in faultless English, but languidly.

Felix Holt, on the other hand, is controversial from the first page to the last. The addition to the title—*the Radical*—is less alarming to-day than it would have been fifty years ago. "Nihilist" would, perhaps, be the nearest approach to a sensational political term that our own time could produce. It is easy to be deceived as to an author's intention; but it has always appeared to me that *Felix Holt* is the exact antithesis of *Middlemarch*. In the latter work the author's hand is hardly ever visible; in *Felix Holt* all is contrived. In *Middlemarch* the story flows naturally; in *Felix Holt* it jolts. In *Middlemarch* we can, if we choose, assert that we have discovered some bias in the author's mind; in *Felix Holt* we cannot close our eyes for a moment to the author's bias. *Middlemarch* is so great that its world of detail remains detail; but the detail of *Felix Holt* is distracting. *Felix Holt* is intended to be great; in fact the very name "Radical"

implies a defiance. It is a trumpet-call, announcing great work; even great political work. It is impossible to imagine George Eliot as having been for a moment influenced by Benjamin Disraeli. But the "political novel" at once puts her work into comparison with, or contrast to, *Sybil* and the others of the famous "trilogy." There is no disguising her bias; there is in fact hardly an attempt at concealment. Here we have the usual properties; to wit, the beautiful Daughter of the People who is not only much "better" than the haughty aristocracy, but (with a strange confusion of ideas) turns out to be an aristocrat herself and actual owner of the property at whose park gates her humble home has so long sheltered her insignificance. There is the great Radical himself who is so wonderfully virtuous and clever and courageous; and who somehow makes no impression at all except that of being an intolerable puppy. There is the family of impoverished aristocrats who are no better than they should be; and of course the selfish lord of the park makes love to the beautiful rightful owner. Equally of course she spurns his honourable advances, preferring the grimy embraces of her Radical (who has just been let out of prison) to the enjoyment of her own property and the spending of a large income.

To complete the absurdity, the aristocratic adorer is as good a Radical as the young man of low extraction. He quitted the diplomatic service, and went into trade, a course of action which ought to have commended him. He was no fool, and speedily amassed a competence—almost a fortune. He was extremely handsome, a good sportsman, commanding in manner and appearance, busy, popular, brilliant,

and thirty-four. I know not what moral we are intended to deduce from this "maiden's choosing": presumably that the poor are good and the rich are bad, and that Annette is the Ewigweibliche, the touchstone of virtue. It may be so. To the gross male Annette appears to be a little goose; while Harold remains upright, intelligent, able—a credit to manhood. For it is to be observed that Annette is dainty, fastidious, and disdainful of mean and ugly surroundings. Surely her chance of happiness with a young cub, impudent, ignorant, and conceited, must be very slender. The episode is more mechanically didactic than anything else that passes under the great name of George Eliot; and hardly more convincing than the marriage of Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexham. If it is designed to teach us that there is no counting on girls, it may be said to be well designed; but it seems rather expensive machinery to employ for the purpose of enforcing so simple a conclusion.

If we regard the detail, the incidental episodes, as apart from the story, we must admit that they are quite admirable. The high life below stairs at Sir Maximus Debarry's is wonderful. Sir Maximus himself, and all the Debarrys, are very strong portraits; and the little piece of countryside in its transition from the agricultural to the manufacturing stage of existence a priceless piece of social history. The lost heir and the wicked lawyer—those well-worn types—are new in *Felix Holt.* In fact there can be few greater tributes to George Eliot's genius than to say, as we most truthfully can say, that *Felix Holt* is not only readable but extremely attractive; and in parts even exciting.

It is usual to praise *Scenes from Clerical Life* as George Eliot's best work. That it is the most popular is quite possible: probable even. To stray for a moment in the gardens of other arts, it is undoubtedly interesting to hear an early composition of Beethoven's; some piece of music in which he is hardly distinguishable from Papa Haydn; but we do not go out of our way to say that it is superior to the Pastoral Symphony. An early architectural drawing by J. M. W. Turner is interesting to possess; but if one had to choose between such a drawing and, say, an early state of "Solway Moss," one would hesitate for one's own reputation to reject the mezzotint. So, when we are in the presence of work like *Middlemarch*, or, indeed, of any of her other works, except perhaps *Theophrastus Such*, we write ourselves down as devoid of discretion when we prefer the crude to the finished. It is true of some sketches that they are finer than the finished picture: Poole's Vision of Ezekiel, for example, lost by the finishing. But the parallel is not exact; for *Scenes from Clerical Life* are not sketches; they are intended for finished work; and are, in fact, finished work—as good as the author could make them. They are very good; and would entitle the author to a place in *Men of the Time;* but when our name is written in Valhalla in letters of gold, we do not trouble about *Men of the Time.* It is usual to insist on the tenderness and insight displayed in these little sketches, as well as on the marvellous fidelity of her study of delirium tremens. The tenderness and insight are there, it is true; but not so beautifully and subtly displayed as in later works. As for delirium tremens, it is a loathsome disease. For my part I cannot be too grateful to George Eliot for having

in her other works left these distressing studies to people who cannot produce their effects otherwise. The study of disease is often praised as showing fearlessness, moral courage, and I know not what lofty mental endowments. I am of Mrs. Naggleton's mind: "Shakespeare had better have avoided such topics, and many others;" or to quote Sir John Chester, a more dignified person: "These anatomical allusions are out of place, Ned; and should be left to gentlemen of the profession."

Theophrastus Such took us all by surprise twenty-five years ago. Of course we all bought it and read it. Later on we ceased to praise it without reserve and merely because it was the work of a revered author. Then harsh things were said of it. But in truth, with the exception of the singular delusion (revealed for the second time in "the modern Hep! hep! hep!") that the Hebrew race stands in need of Christian championship, there is little to find fault with. It cannot rank with the work of Vauvenargues or La Bruyère; but it is pleasant reading. It does not say much, but all is said with great felicity. If one might hazard a conjecture as to its origin, one would be tempted to conclude that the great authoress had laid down her pen, and for a time suspended that serious endeavour during which she lashed and drilled her art with such severity. In *Theophrastus Such* she gave the rein to her phrasiness, a dangerous tool, sparingly used in her other work. *Theophrastus Such* is, in fact, a mild orgy of phrasiness.

W. E. NORRIS

WHEN we have said that Mr. Norris is the Gainsborough of English novelists, we have said what calls for evidence. We have no lack of evidence in the thirty or forty volumes of romance that Mr. Norris has provided for the world's delight. Of remarkably even quality, and all of high merit, they exactly fill the space in the social history of the century that remained when Trollope died twenty-four years ago. In fact, with finer touches and more sumptuous art, Mr. Norris' stories are almost (though of course not intentionally) a continuation of Trollope's. In the *Credit of the County* the hero belongs to "the physically attractive, morally sound, mentally well-balanced and practical illiterate class of English country gentlemen at the close of the nineteenth century." How many of Trollope's characters belonged to the same class, and what men they were! But Trollope wrote before the ruin of the landed interest. He would not—could not—have written the next sentence: "It is an expiring class, doomed by centralisation, free trade, and a recent Chancellor of the Exchequer to disappear ere long." The career of the Chancellor of the Exchequer here referred to was precisely that which awaited many of Trollope's barristers—Frank Greystock, for example, of the *Eustace Diamonds*. Moreover, when we read a sentence on the next page we realise how greatly

"society" changed, not to say deteriorated, in the generation that Trollope never saw. "There was nothing really against the man, except his vulgarity, which can hardly in these days be accounted a disqualifying attribute." But, on the contrary, Mr. Brehgert's vulgarity in the *Way we Live Now* was decidedly counted to him for unrighteousness; and what we see only faintly adumbrated in the *Way we Live Now* strikes us full in the face in the *Credit of the County*.

There can be no greater relief—yes, we must say it, "relief"—from reading George Eliot than a plunge into W. E. Norris. George Eliot had the force and grandeur of Milton, and an abundant sense of humour which Milton had not. Nevertheless, she is exhausting. To live on her high mental plane is a strain. After so much analysis and introspection one is athirst for a more composed presentment of things. Mr. Norris gives it us. Moreover, he comforts us by assuring us that virtue is not the monopoly of the poor; and that it is possible to be in possession of many of the good things of this life, and to enjoy them and yet to be a credit to humanity and a source of happiness to all around us. Best of all, we have a truly Gainsborough-like gallery of noble women. These dress beautifully, and hunt, and enjoy considerable incomes, and never say an unkind word of anybody. It is Mr. Norris' glory that he has set his face against the cheap melodrama of evil, and has elected to tell us of good by preference. It is not necessary, according to him, to be dowdy or hysterical, in order to be good and to do good. On the contrary, he seldom asks our attention for characters who have not "places." Angela Rowe, the kindest and most self-sacrificing of women, who thought last of herself, and who would run any risk

W. E. NORRIS

and take any trouble in order to make others happy, has—there is no disguising it—a clear seven thousand a year and as good a seat on horseback as any lady who hunted with the famous Trentshire pack. Why not?

The plot of the *Credit of the County* is complicated. Mr. Norris is great at delicate embarrassments. The story is, as always, in full dress; and turns on the ambition of some very wealthy people to enter county society by means of taking the hounds without subscriptions. The "County" practically follows old Lady Mount-Sorrel (the mother of the Lord Lieutenant), who declines the acquaintance of the wealthy M.F.H., greatly to the wrath of the wife of the M.F.H. The Bishop of Blackhampton, in whose diocese all these good people live, is fully sensible of the advantage of obliging the wealthy M.F.H., and endeavours to persuade the obdurate Lady Mount-Sorrel to call at "Bewley," the too grandiose name of the too grandiose residence of the M.F.H. There is much diplomacy connected with the suppression of incense in the Diocese; a reform which the strict old dowager has much at heart. But when the courtly Bishop approaches the subject: "'Dear, dear,' sighed the old lady, 'how the grasping sacerdotal spirit comes out there! I give in to you without a murmur; I submit to be gagged, merely stipulating that you shall rebuke a wolf in sheep's clothing whom I don't for one moment believe that you will adequately rebuke; and then, not content with having driven such a hard bargain, you instantly ask for more! And I remember you such a nice, simple, honest boy, too, in days gone by.'"

The old lady gets her way, and the wealthy M.F.H. is driven out of the county, which subsides into the state that Denis Vale describes as "not so much stuck

up as stick in the mud." The exact apportionment of praise and blame due to the actors in this little drama is a very pretty problem. Here let us at once recognise the great merit of Mr. Norris in setting his face against the "problems" that some people think are the only problems existing. Of course these are as old as the hills, and as little susceptible of artistic handling as any of the confused relations of human life. When these little tangles obtrude, as they must occasionally, in the web of human life, Mr. Norris handles them with grace, polish, and reserve—which is the most artistic way of handling them.

For the rest, the picture of English county life is admirable. "The County" has stood for much in English history. But we must not forget that in the days of England's parliamentary greatness "the King's government" meant merely the government of the English counties. Whether that "government" could be carried on by the "Counties" drained of patriotism and the sense of public duty is open to question. That the British Empire can be governed by people frankly contented to be "stick in the mud" is clearly impossible. "Illiteracy" must always have been a reproach; but to-day it is more than a reproach: it is the forerunner of disaster. The hatred of new faces and new ways may not have done much harm in the sleepy centuries of our grandfathers and great-grandfathers: to-day it is a symptom and a cause of sheer imbecility.

Before we say good-bye to the *Credit of the County*, we may note one of those finely chiselled phrases of which even George Eliot might have been proud: "Not to everybody is it given to be a philosopher; but profound egotism is attainable by most of us, and that does very nearly as well."

There are not too many phrases in Mr. Norris' work. His even, fine style carries us easily along the course of his narrative; and we do not call for neat phrases to beguile tedium. The arabesque of *A Bachelor's Blunder*—a long story on the old motive of Sadi—contains, however, so many gems of portraits that we must be allowed to see one in full. It is that of a typical—only too typical—Conservative M.P.: Mr. Lefroy. "The voice of the optimistic legislator was not often heard at St. Stephen's; but when he did speak it was in an easy colloquial manner which invariably charmed and tickled his audience. For a quarter of a century or more he had watched with benign equanimity the forward march of Democracy, voting against it, of course, but not conceiving that the Constitution was in any immediate peril: the passing of Mr. Gladstone's Irish Land Act was perhaps the only thing that had ever given him a serious shock. Against it he had felt bound to deliver one of the few speeches with which he is credited in the pages of Hansard. Let us make no mistake, he said; this was nothing less than a revolutionary measure. He candidly confessed that he did not know much about Ireland himself: he had only been there once; was glad to say that he owned no land there, and was willing to accept provisionally the statements of honourable members who claimed to be better informed. What he did know was, that the rights of property must be considered as the foundation stone of the social edifice; and the House might take his word for it that, when once they began chipping and hammering at that, they would have the whole blessed building down about their ears sooner than they expected.

"There was a good deal of laughter at this, and

somebody wished to know whether the expression 'blessed building' was Parliamentary. The Speaker ruled that it was; and Mr. Lefroy, having said his say and done his duty to the country, crossed his legs and went to sleep. A subservient majority, as we know, passed the Act, and the consequences must be upon their own heads. They cannot at any future date plead that Mr. Montague Lefroy did not warn them of what they were about."

In this atmosphere of easy-going protest, rather than resistance to change, the great Bachelor's Blunder was committed. "Like to a walnut from a dome, culture drops from the boor," wrote Sadi many centuries ago. None the less Dick Herbert decides to make the experiment that Lord Jocelyn le Breton found so great a success according to Sir Walter Besant. These attempts to give effect to kindly sentimental impulse were numerous in the years that saw the so-called triumph of Democracy. Perhaps all have not failed; and since kind thought and deed cannot but tell for good—if not always and wholly for good—the story of Jacob Stiles is not altogether discouraging. The novelty of its treatment, as well as the suspense as to which of several the Bachelor's Blunder may turn out to be, make the book entirely attractive.

Of all the varieties of English life provided by the complicated social conditions of the close of the nineteenth century, perhaps that of the rising watering-place is the least promising. It is probably ephemeral; it lacks the distinction of Weymouth when George the Third was King, or of Brighton in Regency days. It is compounded of strange irreconcilable elements. Probably there is a fishing, not to say smuggling, trade which is on the decline. Mere watering-place

visitors, or even residents, offer little for the casual observer to study. In the background is the "County," its somnolence hardly disturbed by the nondescript activity of its neighbour. Over all broods the so-called "spirit of the age." Careless alike of fishing industries and of "County" traditions, commercialism effects the disagreeable transformation scene to its own vast contentment. Here, as everywhere, Mr. Norris triumphs. It matters not where his scene is laid; nor is it always easy to discover; but *Major and Minor* gives the typical transition watering-place, with such abundance of detail, and with so many ancillary and illuminating episodes, that we find ourselves face to face with an awkward query. It is this. This man is as great a master of detail as Trollope; his style is rather better; yet if we place him above Trollope, who remains but (we must needs face the situation)—Thackeray?

Some difference there must be: otherwise why do so many people know of Beatrice Esmond who never heard of Beatrice Huntley, the heroine of *Major and Minor?* Perhaps the very circumstance of working on material in solution makes Mr. Norris' work of slighter fibre. But nothing can be more adroit than this: "Kingscliff, notwithstanding Buswellian influences and innovations, still maintained something of an old-world character, and mourned its aristocratic, obstinate, but not ungenerous lord of the manor, without perhaps very well knowing why. Monckton, a shrewd observer, attributes this phenomenon—which is not likely to recur—to the fact that Sir Brian Segrave was a gentleman; but declines to explain his meaning more fully on being pressed." Kingscliff was the village in course of transformation; Mr. Buswell—Sir Peter before the story comes to an end—

was the terrible contractor who felt that Kingscliff wanted a music-hall with "high-class entertainments"; and Monckton was the vicar. Yes; a "gentleman" is no longer to be defined; he is harder every day to discover. Yet has Mr. Norris contrived to draw so many that we must needs hope that the type has survived the period of transition. Ladies, too, we find in numbers; and Beatrice Huntley is one more of a goodly company. Beautiful and witty, an admirable dancer, enormously wealthy, overflowing with kindness, and quite as fond of a flirtation as any girl need be, her rich and charming character makes her the most delightful *dea ex machina* that could be devised to solve an extravagantly complicated plot. In effect we have the same delighted embarrassment in watching one of Mr. Norris' plots that we have in following one of Lord Chancellor Westbury's judgments. The man is so great that a solution will assuredly be found, we have no fear; but how in fortune's name there can be discovered a definite—and still more a satisfactory—ending to such involution and convolution is matter for delighted wonder until the end is safely reached.

Major and Minor is a very long story; but the *Baffled Conspirators* is hardly a story at all: it is a mere *jeu d'esprit.* It was but just now that we laid Thackeray and Norris side by side, more by way of comparison than for the sake of dogmatising. In the matter of trifles like the *Baffled Conspirators*, how does the contrast or comparison stand? The *Baffled Conspirators* is the story of three men crossed in love, who join with a confirmed old bachelor, Lord Guise, in forming a Bachelors' Mutual Aid Society. According to the President's ruling, no man in love is a

proper judge of his own affairs; and the members, including Lord Guise (the President), bind themselves on their honour to report to the club their intention to propose, and to await the decision of the club as to whether the marriage that they are contemplating is for their advantage or not. Needless to say, two members of the club fall in love with the same lady —Lady Belvoir—and are promptly exiled (according to the rules of the club) for six months. Lady Belvoir takes her revenge by marrying the President himself.

The very funny plot, rendered still more amusing by the brilliancy of the dialogue, is the nearest approach that Mr. Norris ever makes to the extravaganzas of Thackeray. But even in his extravagance Mr. Norris preserves full dress. The Gainsborough pose is maintained throughout; and this impossibly nonsensical plan is seriously elaborated by quite real people—a Lord of the Treasury, an ex-Guardsman, and an ambitious *nouveau riche*—in a solemn house in Piccadilly.

Not that Mr. Norris shrinks from a strong or even a sensational plot. Many a good writer does so; perhaps thinking that greater skill is called for, and displayed, in writing about nothing in particular than in handling a plot with strong situations. No plot could be more sensational than that of *Misadventure*, which turns on an attempt to murder Captain Bligh of the 24th Lancers. The malignant wretch, Morton Bligh, being more or less tipsy at the time, tumbles over the cliff after pushing his cousin over, and stamping on his victim's fingers to ensure success. The victim escapes; but his end is none the less tragic. The would-be murderer is introduced to us in a conversation that his father holds very early in the book

with Mr. Lowndes the rector. "'It is all very well,' observed Mr. Bligh, 'to say I am not responsible; and perhaps in a certain sense I am not. Looking back upon the past, I suppose I may claim to have done as much for Morton as most fathers do for their sons. I sent him to Eton and Oxford; I have always made him a handsome allowance; I have paid his debts for him several times with more or less of cheerfulness; I even remember that once when he was a boy I whipped him twice—the second time rather severely—for acts of wanton cruelty to animals. Moreover, he has had the full benefit of my experience of life and my large philosophy, while you, my dear Lowndes, have, I know, preached your very best sermons, both practical and doctrinal, at him. If, after all this, he has chosen to go to the deuce, the consequences should be upon his own head, you think. But then comes the question of how far any of us are answerable for our proclivities, or ought to be punished for the natural results of them.'"

This very charming father was unhappy in his son; but would not disinherit him, even for the sake of seeing his daughter married to the deserving Lancer. It was miserably unfortunate that a poaching fisherman should have seen the dreadful struggle on the cliff. He told what he saw; not, alas! to the Lancer—but to a rival lover, a Russian on his mother's side. Mr. Chetwode, the rival lover, has many merits, and even virtues; but he understands both words in the Slav sense. Since one is so desperately puzzled where to place Mr. Norris, let us once more make a comparison. There was a murder case in which Phineas Finn was involved; and many people who could not give the details of *Misadventure* could

tell us all about Mr. Emilius (whose real name was Mealyus) and Mr. Chaffanbrass' masterly cross-examination of Lord Fawn. In all this we must admit Trollope's work to have a robustness which Mr. Norris' work may well possess, but which remains to be demonstrated—by lapse of time. But when we come to the stage-worn "Russian Spy" business we can have no doubts. In Mr. Norris' hands the "Russian Spy" business altogether loses staginess, and becomes actual, convincing, thrilling. The unhappy Lancer makes his way to the Balkan Peninsula, under the impression that his abilities are to be devoted to raising a corps of irregular cavalry, or to some equally reputable and dashing enterprise. But he finds that he is called upon to do nothing more heroic than to murder a Balkan politician—one need not dot the *i*'s. Hence the tragedy; and it must needs be admitted that if Trollope excels in one direction, he is in another direction a grievous fumbler by the side of Mr. Norris.

Perhaps in order to avoid monotony, or perhaps for the reason that his characters insist on taking their own way, Mr. Norris has provided us, in *Adrian Vidal*, with the portraits of two ladies—Lady St. Austell and Mrs. Vidal—neither of whom is particularly attractive. Adrian himself is that rather undesirable type, the young "literary man" who marries on a small income and endeavours to "go into society." Such a *ménage* is not necessarily unhappy; but it most certainly will be unhappy unless both husband and wife care for the same things. Mrs. Vidal, however—devoid of social instinct, uninterested in affairs, and stupidly ignorant of the world—led a dull life. Her husband rather enjoyed activity; but his wife, instead

of getting what good was to be had, could think of nothing more original than to be violently jealous of that very important social personage, the Countess of St. Austell. Jealousy, varied by devotion to hospital work, does not precisely tend to make home happy, and the Vidals were obviously estranged. A great many people who would have done better to mind their own business took occasion to make comments which, perhaps, they would not have made if Mrs. Vidal had not been extremely pretty. Lord St. Austell, a malicious and unprincipled old buck, completes the "square party," and a very pretty series of imbroglios is the result. There is no doubt about Lady St. Austell, who is a silly old woman, and rather a vulgar old woman; but Mrs. Vidal is less easy to define. Good, with all the dulness of virtue, she is lamentably unintelligent and entirely wanting in good nature. She is an extraordinary study, nevertheless, this pretty country girl, proud of her bucolic dulness and unmoved by the glamour of her husband's great success. Amid the glitter of the most brilliant city in the world (when it chooses to show its cheerful side) she can find nothing in London to console her for the loss of her country air and the society of several nice brothers without two ideas in their heads. Withal in love with her husband, in a languid way; for she had refused, for his sake, a wealthy alliance; one which would have enabled her to give her brothers some pleasure, such as yachting and fishing, the only pleasures, in short, which she and they were capable of appreciating.

Billy Bellew is the same puzzle, with a man instead of a girl for the central character. Billy, wealthy, handsome, and popular, can find nothing

better to do with his life than to devote himself platonically to Mrs. Littlewood, a lady who was certainly unfortunate in so far as she possessed an intemperate husband, but whose selfish monopoly of Billy ended in the ruin of his life. He would gladly have espoused a young lady, whose devotion to her family gives us, among many charming pictures, this study of a girl dragging an unwilling brother through his Horace :—

"'*Auditis, an me ludit amabilis Insania?* Do you hear, or does amiable insanity delude me?' asks Micky sleepily; and his instructress has to rouse herself with an effort, in order to point out that 'amiable insanity' can hardly have been the precise condition of mind contemplated by the author of the lines.

"'Oh, I don't know,' returned the boy, yawning; 'I expect he must have been a bit off his head, or he wouldn't have written such bosh. I say, Winnie, don't you think we might knock off for to-day? It *is* so beastly hot! and I think I'm going to have a headache. You know the doctor said most particularly that I wasn't to have headaches.'

"'I can't let you go for another half-hour, Micky,' the inexorable Winifred declared. 'Perhaps you may escape in twenty minutes if only you will get on. Come! *Audire et videor pios errare per lucos amœnæ Quos et aquæ subeunt et auræ.*'

"Micky had resumed despondently: 'I seem to hear pious people wandering through something or other which both agreeable waters and airs——'"

This and everything else to do with Micky is delightfully and tenderly touched. In this book, too, we find that Mr. Norris possesses the rare gift of

transplanting his characters: they are all taken to Algiers. We are shown the melancholy spectacle of English county people, whose æsthetic susceptibilities have been imperfectly cultivated, somewhat astray in the gorgeous East; or in what France has left of the gorgeous East. In this new and agreeable "staging" our old friends play old parts.

But there may be new friends and new parts for them to play: Mr. Norris is very resourceful. If *Billy Bellew* and *Adrian Vidal* make a pair, then, assuredly, *A Dancer in Yellow* and *Clarissa Furiosa* make a pair in a far more dignified sense. In fact it is good to see what Mr. Norris can do when he pulls all the stops out. *Billy Bellew* and *Adrian Vidal* are amiable dissertations on life, but *A Dancer in Yellow* and *Clarissa Furiosa* have great lessons for those who can learn. Not that they are consciously, or perhaps designedly, didactic. The smooth graceful language, the easy treatment of complicated matters—that same easy handling that men of the world accord to real difficulties—meet us here as everywhere in Mr. Norris' works. Perhaps few "international complications," not excluding those "complications" which end in war, have hurt the population of these islands more than the so-called "Woman's Question." Few if any have been, in the strict sense of the words, more profoundly irreligious; none have made more desperate, more logical, or more stirring appeals to all that is most chivalrous in man. The discord, not to say enmity, which the fautors of this "movement" have striven and not unsuccessfully to foster between man and woman is probably incalculable. I know of no piece of Literature that sets this "movement" forth, without dogmatism, without passion,

yet with such dramatic effect, as these two novels. The keynote of the whole "movement" is the dreadful phrase that women ought to "lead their own lives," apart from men. The fallacy, of course, in this apparently strong position, is the idea that it is possible for either men or women to live lives worth living apart from women or men as the case may be.

Mr. Norris' forte is the portrayal of ladies; but in the *Yellow Dancer* he has chosen to give us the picture of a girl who was not by birth or manners a lady, and who chose, in spite of the attractions of rank and a landed estate, to devote herself to her art. The most rigid censor of morals would have found nothing to censure in the life of Daisy Villiers—or Lady Coplestone as she became—and no one who cares for, or seeks to promote happiness, can refrain from weeping over her fate. With equal certainty no one who possessed a spark of feeling for justice could hesitate to endorse Mr. Norris' concluding dictum: "Many ladies of high degree will find themselves compelled to walk behind Daisy Villiers in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Daisy Villiers' career was an artistic success but a human failure; partly perhaps in consequence of mankind's failure to profit by Tommy Fellowes' philosophy, to wit: "'The older I grow, my dear Coplestone—and I'm very nearly grown up now, I'm sorry to say—the more alive I become to the beauty and holiness of minding my own business.'" Yet Daisy Villiers "lived her own life" in all conscience. So did Lady Luttrell, the heroine of *Clarissa Furiosa*, and a very different type from the Dancer in Yellow.

We shall never know exactly what artists mean.

Probably they do not know themselves; they are but channels of communication between mortals and the Divine Wisdom; and in venturing to bracket the *Dancer in Yellow* with *Clarissa Furiosa* it is quite possible that I have taken a liberty with the author's intentions—if he had any. Nevertheless, there can be very little doubt about the atmosphere of *Clarissa Furiosa;* for we have, here, all the dread phrases and all the staid rejoinders; and both set forth with the dispassionate ascription to origins dignified, or the reverse, which marks the great artist. "'I want women to realise that they are not less entitled than men to the individual freedom which is the birthright of every human being; I want them to realise that marriage need not, and ought not to be, another name for slavery.'" So Clarissa. How well one knows the mournful patter! Clarissa Luttrell with her "afternoons," her dreary "drawing-room meetings," her "platform speeches," her "pamphlets," and the dreadful mistake that she falls into—or allows Mr. Loosemore (a recognisable portrait) to fall into—is the direct intellectual heir of the Gwendolen of 1865 and the Dorothea of yet thirty years earlier. Very astonishing is the development of the Woman's Question. The wasted good makes the pity of it. The social observer of a hundred years hence will see "The Movement" merely as a grey smudge on the life of the century. Perhaps as it is nearly thirty years since J. S. Mill—(wind-Mill, as a truly Norrisian lady in real life once called him)—ceased to sadden the minds of innocent young people of both sexes, one may be permitted to ascribe most of the mischief to the preachings of that desiccated prophet.

The wicked Guy (Clarissa's husband) actually

"invited Léonie what's her name—upon my word, I've forgotten the girl's name," to supper, and was known to have addressed remarks of at least ordinary civility to quite a number of ladies. Thereupon Clarissa became "Clarissa Furiosa," and took her five thousand a year to Cadogan Gardens; offering, however, to share that comfortable income with the wicked Guy, but declining to have him in the house. Now Guy was an officer and a gentleman, and was not to be bought off. But he hated being a bore to anybody, most of all to his wife, and acceded to a request which made him look absurd, only stipulating that he might see his daughter now and then. He had "seen it coming on" in Ceylon, where he had gone with his regiment, and had even remonstrated with his wife: "'You shouldn't let your mind run upon such questions: once you start upon that line you can't tell where the deuce you'll stop. It would look awfully bad if you gave up going to church just because there are some things you can't understand! If it comes to that, who *does* understand them? Of course I don't set up to be an authority; but there's the church, you know, and the early Fathers and all those learned old chaps. Don't you think it is a little bit arrogant to assume that they have been telling lies for the last eighteen hundred years or so?'"

This simple doctrine carried no weight with Clarissa, who produced, when she was "living her own life," that stirring pamphlet, *The Perjury of Marriage.* Her poor old father-in-law, Sir Robert Luttrell, Chancellor of the Duchy, could only say to his wife: "'Come, *ma mie*, let us go indoors to our tea, and be thankful that we were born such a long time ago. We may have been fools in our youth, but I cannot

think that we were ever quite so idiotic as the young men and women of to-day.'"

It would ill become any man—or woman—to ridicule an idea that held a hope for the future. Since life is progress and death is stagnation, every movement is to be commended. But is this so-called movement a movement in any reasonable meaning of the words? Thirty years may not be, are not, much in the history of the race. Nevertheless the record of what passes in thirty years is worth preserving. In thirty years children grow to middle age; young ones grow to old ones; old ones grow to very old age. During the thirty years that have elapsed since the "Woman's Movement" attained the dignity of capital letters, has the alleged "movement" added to the happiness of mankind? Let us accept, for the moment, its own preposterous divorce of man from woman, and inquire, "Has it added to the happiness of womankind?" If it has added to the happiness of the world it is justified. But has it? After all, the easy-going comment of Lady Luttrell is not without significance: "'These notions, which she seems to have taken up about the rights or wrongs—I can't remember which it is—of women.'" Well may Lady Luttrell forget; rights or wrongs of women (or men) are not so easily distinguished. The attempt to mark off "women" as a separate race has made a vast amount of bad blood; but it can hardly be said to have made anything else.

If we desire to place the "movement" with any accuracy we ought also to remember that in that very late work of Anthony Trollope, *Is he Popenjoy?* we were privileged to be introduced to the Baroness Bandmann; and were also made acquainted with her financial embarrassments. The "movement" clearly

made great strides in the years that separated the Baroness Bandmann from Lady Luttrell. The Baroness was glad of a ten-pound note. Clarissa had five thousand a year of her own. To Trollope the movement was a shady craze; twenty years later it was a moneyed craze. There is that much difference between 1875 and 1895, but it remained a craze.

Chris is a short and clever story, about which there is nothing to be said except that it is noteworthy that a fine style should be preserved in the narration of such a trifle. For those who love "Norris" stories, *Chris* is perhaps interesting for another reason. In *Chris* the author has decided to place his heroine in anything but Gainsborough-like surroundings; and has even introduced a good deal of London dialect, which he has handled with much humour and dexterity. Our grandchildren will probably be unable to distinguish between the dialect of Primrose Hill and the dialect of Whitechapel. It was to Whitechapel that Clarissa betook herself in the days when "slumming" was a fashionable occupation. Martha Stubbs, however, was more genteel; and there are marked points of difference (no doubt to the advantage of Martha) between the two varieties of incorrect English. The point for us to notice is that Mr. Norris has accurately observed and recorded those points of difference.

"'Tell her, with my love, that her friend shall be looked after, and that everything shall be done to make his stay in Paris pleasant. That is, unless he is an inquiring M.P. or a man with ideas about European politics who writes for reviews—in either of which cases you will have to undertake him. You might intimate to Peg that it is as much as my place is worth to mix myself up with people of

that kind, and that I really can't do it even to please her.'"

So the British Ambassador in Paris to his wife, on being asked to be kind to the hero of the *Countess Radna*. The hero is a young man, formerly in the Guards, and now the possessor of a pleasant, but not very large, estate adjoining the more considerable property of Peggy Rowley. He intends to enter Parliament; and his obvious destiny is to marry Miss Margaret Rowley, a lifelong friend and neighbour. But in Paris he is introduced to the Countess Radna, an enormously wealthy Hungarian orphan, brilliant and distinguished. He marries her; and we are presented with the subtle study of a lady of this type face to face with the sober routine of a country gentleman's life when it is enlivened by political aspirations. It must be admitted that the work is admirably done. The young people are undeniably in love, and everything promises well, if it were not for the facts, which are that the Countess (and really there is a good deal to be said for her) cannot imagine why her husband should want to do anything so dull and useless as enter the House of Commons, or why, if he enjoys it, she should not be allowed to do something less tiresome than entering "political society." Her fine mind is in contemptuous revolt at the truly British pursuits of her handsome husband; and the rough and tumble of election work (which Peggy Rowley thoroughly enjoys) seems to her quite beneath people of her rank. So her Hungarian neighbours think; and they even include the Countess' husband in the things which they regard as beneath her.

One would say that the novel had an almost Disraelian intensity, if it were not that in Disraeli's novels

the important people talk about important things; whereas in Mr. Norris' pages they occupy themselves with sport and gossip. "'I know quite well what it is you Englishmen admire,' says the Countess. 'The man who can jump higher, or run faster, or kill more birds than you can, stands upon a much more lofty pinnacle in your esteem than the greatest statesman or philosopher or poet of the age. I don't think it is true that you take your pleasures sadly; but you take them very seriously—far more seriously than your duties. One of the funniest things in this funny country is the contrast between the perfection with which all your amusements are organised and the slipshod fashion in which you manage your army, your navy, the conduct of your public business, and other matters of secondary importance. What astonishes me is that my husband should have deliberately chosen to busy himself with such trifles. It would have been so much better to devote his whole attention to hunting and shooting and cricket, wouldn't it?'"

Trollope's bias was never concealed. One would hesitate to say that Mr. Norris had no bias; but it is certainly not obtruded. If he has a preference for the type represented by his own Denis Vale and Guy Luttrell and Douglas Colborne (Countess Radna's husband), he has not shrunk from showing us his friends in contrast with some types decidedly higher. It must be admitted that, by the side of the Countess Radna, Peggy Rowley seems—well, rather common; and Colborne himself very schoolboyish. The Marchese di Leonforte, a Sicilian noble with the ideas of about the fourteenth century, moves through the story as a perpetual note of interrogation. "Are we really

so far ahead of you?" the nineteenth century seems to ask of the fourteenth at every turn of the story. It makes no difference that, being utterly astray in his century, the Marquis commits blunder after blunder—he remains a noble type that we have lost.

We leave our Douglas Colborne happily wedded to his Peggy (after the death of the Countess), and we feel that the higher type has not survived. We even doubt whether a representative assembly controlled by Vales and Colbornes is really the last possibility of government machinery. If so, can we expect such lumbering machinery not to be superseded? and will not more intelligent people pass us in the race?

A Deplorable Affair is a trifle, after the manner of *Chris;* and turns upon the well-known and well-worn blunder of mistaking the wicked brother for a lover of the heroine. It is very deftly handled, and more than readable. But in *The Despotic Lady* we have some of the cleverest high-comedy situations of the century. For those who love to dogmatise about humour and pathos being inseparable it may be reassuring to note that *Old Jackson* in the same volume is intensely moving. It is often said that the real test of skill is the power of writing short stories. If that be so, Mr. Norris need have no fear for his reputation. In fact, the little tale *When Greek Meets Greek* is such a *tour de force*, that I doubt whether any other man alive or dead could have written it. Yet nobody ever heard of *When Greek Meets Greek;* nor, for the matter of that, is it easy to discover anybody who reads "Norris." Presumably somebody must read his writings; but I never met anybody who even knew his name except, twenty years ago, a lady who advised me to read *No New Thing. Mademoiselle*

de Mersac I discovered for myself in a periodical—*Good Words*, I think—and from that date I have read everything that appeared over the signature W. E. Norris. Those who do not, miss a pleasure, and, in the case of a short story like *When Greek Meets Greek*, or a long story like *The Fight for the Crown*, an illuminating study of politics present or recently past.

The Fight for the Crown is a title, and no more; it appears to have no relation to the story, which is a study of the Irish Question. Thackeray might have done good work for his country if he had decided to turn his attention to Ireland in a sympathetic temper. But he elected to gibe and jeer instead. Mr. Froude tried honestly to help things on with his *Two Chiefs of Dunboy;* but fiction was not his strong point, and the *Two Chiefs* probably helped things on but very little. Where Thackeray turned aside and Froude attempted and failed, Norris has succeeded admirably.

For information on the Irish Question the eager inquirer has, as a rule, to depend either upon statistics or declamation. Nobody takes statistics seriously except people who are too stupid to understand anything else; and declamation goes (and ought to go in so serious a matter) for nothing with Englishmen. The late M. Zola made an impassioned appeal to Art to save his country from the curse of sterility; and followed up his appeal by a powerful contribution of his own—*La Fécondité.* But his appeal was slightly ridiculous; and *La Fécondité* was so grotesquely misinformed that M. Zola's influence can hardly be said to have been a force in the land—at least so far as an Englishman is competent to form an opinion. Probably in writing *The Fight for the Crown* Mr. Norris

had no mind to do anything except to make good "copy" out of Ireland. But since he is a sincere and consummate and dispassionate artist, he has produced a tractate of the first importance; important because it is readable, which most treatises on Irish affairs are not.

The hero of the story, Wilfrid Elles, goes to Ireland in the suite of a Liberal Viceroy still living; and being intelligent and eager, does not confine his activity to dancing and shooting. First he keeps his eyes open and seeks to get an impression of the capital. "It was not so much that so many of the thoroughfares were dirty, the pavements narrow, and the houses mean; that much might be said of a great part if not the greater part of London. But London, for all its gloom, squalor, and ugliness, looks alive, rich, and busy; whereas Dublin has the listless, poverty-stricken air of a capital which has seen its best days and does not expect to see them back again. It was that air—whether real or imaginary—of dull resignation which chiefly struck this Anglo-Saxon explorer, and even caused him a slight sense of personal discomfort, as representing the conquering race, which had known so ill how to deal with its conquests. Like most young Englishmen, he had been taught to regard the Irish as a rebellious people, against whom it was necessary to employ force from time to time, yet merry withal, delighting in rows rather for the fun of the thing than out of rancour towards anybody, and prone to enjoy life after a reckless, out-at-elbow, devil-may-care fashion. But somehow or other they and their metropolis did not at first sight appear to correspond in the least to such preconceived notions. The poorly furnished shops, the scarcity of equipages,

the all-pervading stagnation, seemed to tell a tale of prolonged misgovernment and smothered discontent which would have been more appropriate in Warsaw; the passers-by met the gaze of the inquiring stranger —or he fancied that they did—with sullen unfriendly side-glances. And this was really rather disappointing of them, considering that the gates of Kilmainham had been flung open, that there was to be no more talk of buckshot or of arrests on suspicion, and that the Land Act was about to be amended.

"But if Grafton Street and Dame Street were thus coldly repellent, what was to be said of the byways round about the frowning Castle and the banks of the Liffey whither Wilfrid presently wandered? There was something more than melancholy, something positively sinister and menacing in the silence of these long quays on either side of the evil-smelling river, and the monotonous row of dilapidated dwellings which looked down upon them through broken and unclean windows; it had to be admitted that something must be seriously amiss with a country whose chief city exhibited a countenance of that description."

With this conviction in his mind, "something seriously amiss," Wilfrid Elles quits the capital and betakes himself to Kerry, where he has a friend, a landlord, who is the happy possessor of an ancient seat, some really good rough shooting, and a beautiful daughter Nora. In Kerry he finds himself face to face with the puzzling sight of an excellent landlord on the verge of ruin. The tenants who will not pay their dues have never received anything but kindness and consideration at Mr. Power's hands; nevertheless the landlord and his sons thoughtfully take down a revolver apiece before they turn in: "The custom of

the country," they apologetically explain. There must be something "seriously amiss" in the country as well as in Dublin.

Nora Power enlightens him a good deal. It is from her that he first learns that English people cannot expect to understand Irish people; not (at any rate) without more trouble than they are prepared to take. In due course, Elles is elected to Parliament as a Home Ruler; and encounters his friends the Powers, completely ruined by now, and living in poverty at West Kensington. Having advocated "Justice to Ireland," he now learns that so-called "Justice" can only be attained at the cost of inflicting ruin, with gross injustice, on the best friends of Ireland. This is heartrending work; and the kind of talk indulged in by the most fluent and promising of Home Rule advocates does not hold much promise of that sympathetic understanding by which alone, as he believes, the problem is to be solved. "'We shall sweep the country, because the heart of the country is with us; and England's heart, as all history teaches, has never failed to prove itself mightier than the wisest heads.'" So the fluent Apostle. "'What,' inquires Wilfrid, 'does that mean?'

"'I haven't the most distant idea,' replies Lady Laura Mayne, the lady to whom the Apostle is engaged; 'nor, I should imagine, has he. It sounds as if he meant that England had always preferred folly to wisdom; but whether that is the teaching of history or not I can't remember; I have been so long out of the schoolroom. Perhaps it doesn't very much matter.'"

Those who lived through the melancholy years 1880–1886 will recognise the temper of public life in

this short conversation. England was ready enough to "do the right thing," anxious even. England, in fact, was quite ready to be bullied by Ireland, and even prepared to be sympathetic. But sentimental drivel, meaningless when it was not purely malicious, was all that was to be had by way of enlightenment on the Irish Question; and when English people had taken as much trouble as they could, and come to no satisfactory conclusions, they were contented to conclude that "perhaps it doesn't very much matter."

The Fight for the Crown, if saddening, is instructive and even helpful; but rather exhausting. In *Giles Ingilby* we return to pure romance, a clever plot and much exciting incident. The hero, aspiring to an alliance somewhat beyond him, thus consoles himself: "'I presume,' Giles reflected, 'that I may, at any rate, call myself a gentleman.' In these days such a presumption is so modest and indeed so universal that there really appears to be no alternative to it, except calling one's self a cad, which is rather too much to require of anybody's humility." Trollope would never have written this. In his day men had no doubts: certainly Trollope had none. Nothing marks more strongly the change in the social atmosphere of the last twenty years of the century than the disappearance of the "gentleman" ideal. "What is a gentleman?" inquires Lady Belvoir in the *Baffled Conspirators:* "a person entitled to bear coat-armour." Precisely: and if we travel outside this limit we land ourselves in endless difficulties. Cardinal Newman's famous and laborious definition merely describes a dishoused snail; so we must rest in the conclusion that any one may become a "gentleman" by drawing a modest cheque, and the word disappears from our

vocabulary, except as a term of derision, which it will probably become in another twenty years.

In *Heaps of Money* we travel far back in the century to the years when Austria was about to fight Prussia. This book was published in 1877. Some signs of an immature style are apparent, a certain uneasiness of manner, an occasional ineffective wealth of detail; the firm and brilliant strokes of *When Greek Meets Greek* are yet to seek. This is natural and not unpleasing: the story itself being ingenious and happy. A pretty girl travelling on the Continent with a shady father, and living on a narrow income, has to endure slights. Linda Howard, the girl in *Heaps of Money*, resents them. "'It always makes me laugh when I read in the newspapers that old fiction about Englishmen having a partiality for the weaker side; because, as far as my experience goes, that is exactly what Englishmen never do. So long as you are rich and have a title they can't be too civil to you; but if you are poor and friendless and unknown they are not contented with ignoring you—they must needs insult you into the bargain.'" These are bitter words; yet—allowing for the exasperation of a young lady in a humiliating position—there is too much truth in them to be at all agreeable. The core of the matter is that we English judge of each other entirely by adventitious circumstances. In judging of A or B we do not take the trouble to inquire what the man is, or what he can do; these are difficult questions. We content ourselves with asking: (1) Who are his people? (2) What was his school? (3) What is his handicap? It was my fortune not so long since to be put through my paces by an inquiring American who wanted to see how things were done in the old country. He asked,

"What is the best school in England?" to which I naturally replied, "Eton." "What do they learn there?" "As to 'learning,' I don't know. I don't think boys are sent to Eton to learn things." "Why do they go then?" Upon reflection, I replied, "Either because their fathers were at Eton, or because their fathers were not at Eton." "What do they do when they get there?" "Play games, I believe." My American acquaintance clearly thought that I was practising upon the ignorance of a stranger; but he contented himself with saying: "Well, sir! you won't long remain a great power if that's all you think of education."

My American friend may have been right or wrong; it remains to be seen whether it is wise or safe to pay so much attention to externals and so little to essentials. But in *Marietta's Marriage* Mr. Norris quite definitely expresses his faith in the capacity of the sportsman to do anything in the future just as he had done everything in the past. Certainly the statesmen of a different type that we have been blessed with have not been conspicuous for their success in handling thorny matters which have beaten the sportsman. *Marietta's Marriage* might almost have been written by Anthony Trollope. It is very long, rather melodramatic, smoothly told, and full of detail. To be strictly fair, it is perhaps commonplace. In the last respect it is a great contrast to *His Grace;* which is as good work as anything that Mr. Norris has done, and is further remarkable for containing two portraits of the most disagreeable women in Mr. Norris' gallery —Miss St. George, a young beauty, and Lady Deverel, a spiteful old woman. "His Grace" is the Duke of Hurstbourne, one of those charming, ingenuous young

men of whom perhaps his creator was thinking when he wrote: "To the Englishman of noble or gentle birth and sufficient fortune nothing is apt to seem quite so important in life as sport and pastimes. These, indeed, may almost be said to constitute the chief pleasures of his existence; from earliest childhood he is initiated into the science, the rules, and the discipline of them; they form his character, determine his habit of mind, and make him what he is. He might, as most unprejudiced persons will agree, be a very much worse fellow; some may even doubt whether a different system of education could have produced a much better fellow. Such as he is, he has rûled our national destinies for generations, with results of which we have no great need to be ashamed; and now that the advance of democracy is rapidly taking power out of his hands, it does not seem altogether certain that his successors will prove his superiors. An alien critic, to be sure, may plausibly maintain that politics are rather too serious to be treated as a mere game, but perhaps alien critics do not realise that it is possible to make games serious enough for anything."

One would hesitate to endorse the statement that democracy is taking power out of the hands of the sportsmen. What appears to be happening is that as the old acres pass into new hands the new squires everywhere hasten to adopt the manners and habits of their predecessors: perhaps because those habits are really congenial to our race, perhaps because there is no surer road to popularity than to pretend, at least, that they are congenial. Probably the change in the countryside is not more momentous than that which saw the foundation of our "old families" of to-day

by the "new men" of the sixteenth century. The "advance of democracy" has only resulted in placing power more definitely and decidedly than ever in the hands of the aristocracy.

Mademoiselle de Mersac, a very sad story, is conspicuous for the finished portrait of the Vicomte de Saint Luc, a perfect gentleman of the Second Empire, or of any other period for the matter of that. St. Luc is one of the best pieces of work that Mr. Norris ever turned out. Jeanne de Mersac is an interesting study of a girl half French, half English: on the whole rather aggravating. The scene is laid in Algiers mostly.

Why does the St. Luc type thrive so badly in England? St. Luc was a crack shot and presumably a good horseman, since he held a commission in a cavalry regiment. Yet it is ludicrous to think of St. Luc talking "gunpowder" after dinner; such an agreeable and accomplished man would no more dream of doing that than of committing any other *gaucherie*. That is the worst of the sportsman ideal: it is so terribly vulgarising. Nor is it hard to see why it should be. Granted the truth of all that is said, and truly said, about the "mental discipline" of sport, there still remains a good deal that is not so edifying. The boy who finds that it is easy to play games and hard to do something else, naturally follows by preference the pursuit that comes easiest to him. Nobody can blame him for this; but then there is nothing morally uplifting in the spectacle of a man or a boy following his own pleasure. The child is father to the man. The tradesman who can talk of nothing but his wares has long been a favourite subject for satire. But he is not more essentially impossible or vulgar than the sportsman whose mind is

atrophied on every subject except one amusement. How atrophy of the intellect can be a source of mental vigour passes my comprehension. Yet we are continually assured that in the world of statesmanship it is an advantage to be ignorant of everything but two expensive amusements which, somewhat arrogantly, reserve to themselves the name of "sport." It may be so; but then, on the other hand, it is quite possible that people who approach the affairs of state with more gravity and intelligence may get the better of us. Granted, for the sake of argument, that intellect is the enemy. It is never safe to despise one's enemy.

Matrimony and *Matthew Austin* are two full-length portraits, the one of a wealthy, witty, and worldly wise old diplomatist—Vincent Gervis; the other of a hard-working and abundantly generous-minded country doctor. In both cases the wealth of detail makes a rich background for the portraits—but nothing more. *An Octave* is a group of sketches recalling those small portfolios, or pictures hung in a bad light, and catalogued "In the manner of," "attributed to," or "after" some master. *My Friend Jim* has many merits; one of them being the study of Helen Turner, afterwards Lady Bracknell, correct, beautiful, fashionable, and perhaps the most repulsively immoral being that Mr. Norris ever created.

Mr. Chaine's Sons, *Mr. Fenton*, and *Miss Wentworth's Idea* are enough to make the reputation of any writer except Mr. Norris. They are all good work; they have good plots and give much pleasure in the reading: one would say that they were altogether good if there were not so many books by the same author that are so much better. What shall we say to this passage? "We cannot help observing that

artists, musicians, and literary men are neither better nor wiser than their neighbours; and what is especially noticeable about them is a lack of that generosity which should surely belong to those whose brain-power exceeds the average. Various explanations of what at first sight looks like a puzzling phenomenon have been put forward from time to time. The excessive irritability of the artistic temperament is, of course, one of them; and it is not without diffidence, reluctance, and a due sense of the unpopularity of such a view that the narrator of the present history ventures to suggest his own modest theory, which is that artists are not, as a general rule, men of good birth." This is a truly noble sentiment. It ought to draw down a benediction from the ghost of St. Simon. But it has rather an odd ring in the twentieth century. "Men of good birth," indeed! How many men of good birth has one known who are not worthy to wait on their own footmen! Nevertheless it is a great artist who has written this, passed it for press, and published it. *Stat factum.* As an indication of the position held by Art in the twentieth century's first decade, it is a revelation—nothing less than a revelation. Commerce has made its way; to be rich is to be honoured; to be poor is disgraceful: there is no use in questioning these sound British sentiments. But Art has made no way at all. If an artist is highly successful he may take rank with the third-rate men of business as a prosperous man; but as an artist it has still to be inquired whether he is that far inferior person a man of good birth. Probably no harder thing will be said of the twentieth century in the course of the next ninety-six years.

Not that Mr. Norris cannot appreciate the artistic

point of view. Mr. Mostyn (he bears that old name and is presumably a "man of good birth") says in *A Victim of Good Luck*: "'I never tell polite fibs on the subject of Art, which I take to be the one serious thing in this world of irony and farce and charlatanism.'" Well, that is a great and an honest position to take up, and although it obviously may lead to a considerable amount of charlatanism on the part of people who are not great enough to hold such language, yet we are, in this case, given to understand that Mr. Mostyn was quite great. Nevertheless he is made to play a poor hand: the sportsman being, as usual, four by honours.

Inasmuch as the question is to be found in every form of literature and in many forms of pictorial art throughout the century, let us spend a few minutes in inquiring which of the two cants—the cant of Art, and the cant of Sport—is the more widely spread, and the more injurious. We may leave out of consideration the really great. Like real kings, the great Artist and the great Sportsman have positions too well assured for cant to be possible. When we come to the second-rate men the artistic fraud becomes an affected bore and the sporting fraud becomes a brutal bore. The artistic fraud has been satirised to an extent out of all proportion to his importance. A few, a very few, young people keep up for a few years of their lives a number of affectations—some harmless, some aggravating—and make "Art" the excuse for idleness and self-indulgence. If there is anything in them they either follow Art seriously and become genuine, or they drop affectation, and follow ordinary avocations. A very few remain hopeless: the range of their influence is extremely restricted.

Far other is it with the "sportsman" ideal. To begin with, it is a matter of very great difficulty to sustain the rôle of art-performer or art-critic unless one has some real aptitude for the Art in question. Detection is inevitable and retribution prompt. It is far easier to affect the sportsman plausibly; and the affectation is handsomely rewarded. The result is written in the voluminous literature of anti- (various things) Leagues, and in the more dramatic literature of ruined homes and beggared lives throughout the country. The "Anti" Leagues will not effect much: but if two sporting Dukes would say, "Is that all?" when a man was recommended to them on the ground that he was a "sportsman," they would do the State much service. Sport has its place, and a fine one, in the life of the nation. Trollope, as sound a sportsman as ever lived, knew it, and made his most gallant character, Frank Tregear, say what it was. Frank joined a good shoot with Silverbridge and Gerald Palliser and Nidderdale. Dobbs got it up; but when Frank had had enough he said so; and when Dobbs tried to bully him, he replied, "We're not doing it for our living." The same good sportsman was of the opinion that a "gentleman ought not to play billiards like a marker." When "sport" is taken out of this, its proper, position as a distraction, and made to take the place of graver pursuits, it is ruined as "sport," and becomes wasteful indulgence; and, for those who cannot afford it, simply dishonest. How far this debasing process has gone we best realise when we read the way in which people are contented to speak of the lesser sports. It is hardly possible to take up a copy of any of the so-called sporting periodicals without finding an allusion to the "good old Anglo-

Saxon grit and pluck"—or "the qualities that have made our race what it is"; and all about what?—a game of golf won in a high wind perhaps. We never hear firemen, sailors, or men who have been through the siege of Ladysmith, or, in short, men who have done anything worth talking about, indulge in this lamentable braggadocio. When a whole nation condescends to such degrading nonsense, and means it seriously, "sport" has at least risen to the rank of a national danger.

Tom Heywood, "the Rogue," is an excellent "Sportsman"; that is to say, he can ride not only well, but well enough to win races; he can shoot very well indeed: and that is about all he can do. When we come to the result of this training as a "sportsman," we find that he pulls horses cleverly enough not to be found out; he traffics in his sister's honour and she continues to adore him and to despoil herself for his benefit; he marries and deserts his wife, and when she dies she leaves him a large fortune; he commits fraudulent acts in business, and somebody is always ready to hush things up; he misappropriates funds, and his defalcations are instantly concealed and his losses made good. He gambles and drinks, and everybody vows that he is the best of good fellows; he even reads neat little homilies on the desirability of "being straightforward" to the people he has plundered; and he ends up by marrying a good-looking widow who declines to hear a word against him, and settles down to a delightful Mayfair-cum-Melton existence. Thus we see what a useful thing it is to be able to call oneself a "sportsman," and what a waste of time it is to practise virtues that nobody respects. In Tom Heywood's career we see

the value of Herbert Spencer's injunction to bring ourselves into accord with the conditions around us lest we be smashed. Nothing can be more finely and dexterously handled than the means taken by Tom Heywood to secure "the survival of the fittest" in his own desirable person. But what a point for the once great "middle classes" of England to have reached!—a point where idleness, thriftlessness, and self-indulgence are openly applauded as "manly" and "sporting."

Thirlby Hall is a pleasant old-fashioned story, frankly old-fashioned and entirely wholesome if rather sad. The figures are a little dim but very gracefully touched. The period is the Crimean War; and we have but to place *Thirlby Hall* side by side with *Ravenshoe* in order to realise what Henry Kingsley could do at his best. For good though *Thirlby Hall* is, *Ravenshoe* is far more vivid and intense.

In *The Widower* we come much nearer to our own time, and are presented with the study of profound melancholy in the man who strove so earnestly to do his best and failed so lamentably. It even seems a little didactic, as if Mr. Norris would like to see how the British type looks when side by side with types more vivacious and flexible. In the author's dispassionate detachment from the actions of his creatures we recognise his essential mental honesty; for *The Widower* is of the matter-of-fact "sporting-political" type that Mr. Norris himself believes in, and he does not shine. *A Man of His Word* is a series of sketches that one would hesitate to ascribe to Mr. Norris if they were not published in his name; and *St. Ann's* is a slighter novel on the same lines as *Matrimony*. It is concerned, that is, with the

society of a small watering-place and the county society around. It is really remarkable, however, for the portrait of "Lola," the half English, half South American girl. Her violent temper combined with an inexorable will make her a truly remarkable study.

The modest title *No New Thing* is accorded by the author to a story which, if not exactly "new," is at least handled with much dexterity, and is so fresh in itself that we can hardly acquit the author of over-modesty. In *A Man of His Word* we have a number of bright studies, mostly showing familiar characters in foreign surroundings. "Lola" is a girl almost wholly un-English, in English surroundings; and Philip Marescalchi—the most carefully elaborated figure in *No New Thing*—is a man, half Italian by birth, and educated at Eton and Oxford. For a skilful artist the subject has possibilities; and Mr. Norris grasps and uses all the possibilities of a situation, not "new" it is true, but so ably handled as to be classic. "Mr. Merryskulker," as the vindictive old housekeeper renders his name, does as many wrong things as this version of his name would naturally lead us to expect. He makes an excellent pair to Tom Heywood: the English "rogue" and the Italian "rogue." The superior ability of the Italian is marked; for (though an Eton and Oxford man) he takes no pains to pose as a "sportsman," and more or less jeers at games. He even embraces an "Art"—the art of singing—which he follows languidly; and contrives to patronise and lecture his betters very prettily and successfully. In him the Italian adroitness and resourcefulness are fully developed, and exist as controlling factors in a nature

wholly and repulsively selfish, though his wrong-doing is at least as hateful as Tom Heywood's. They make a wonderful pair. *His Own Father* would be remarkable if it contained one sentence only: "Oh! he's an Austrian, if there's any harm in that . . . though he is really a good enough sportsman to have been born in our favoured islands." This of Otto von Kahlenburg, a Count of the Holy Roman Empire. Shades of Augustus and Charles the Fifth!—"a good enough sportsman to be an Englishman." Ridiculous and almost burlesque though the phrase sounds, it is nevertheless the wholly lamentable truth that many Englishmen would say this and mean it. Many who think it would say it if they were articulate, and all alike remain imbecilely unconscious of their own mournful absurdity.

The Flower of the Flock is a study of Anglo-American *hig-lif* between the years of the Baring crash and the second Ashanti War. The hero is once more the fascinating sportsman, whose physical charms conquer all hearts and overcome all scruples. So subtly is the work done that it is hard to say when one lays down the book whether Mr. Norris is satirising his brilliant society or not. Surely he must be.

Marcia and *Nature's Comedian* are two bitter, relentless satires on the artistic temper. Admirable though both studies are, one lays them down with something of the irrational feeling contained in the phrase, "I should be sorry to think . . . ." But when this feeling—the result of Mr. Norris' art—has passed away, we recollect the successful old artist in *A Bachelor's Blunder*. We see that

Mr. Norris (like the consummate artist that he is) fully appreciates the labour, the self-denial, the daily sacrifice of pleasure to the attainment of a distant end, the unsparing self-condemnation—in one sentence, all the thorns and trials that the successful artist must face before he wins to his own. Yet there is hardly a doubt that ninety-nine per cent. of Englishmen would aver that the artistic temper involved at least a tinge of disreputability and untrustworthiness, whereas the "sportsman," whatever else he might be, was sure to be "straight" and "a gentleman."

We have now come to the end—or very nearly to the end—of Mr. Norris' novels. Why do we accord them so much attention? Especially if, as some say, his works are "superficial." Let it be granted, for the sake of discussion, that he is superficial: for that very reason he is the man qualified before all others to write of the English at the opening of the twentieth century; for they have become a people more superficially varied than at any other epoch of their history.

JANE AUSTEN

MISS AUSTEN'S fame is great, her adorers are many. It is three-quarters of a century since she died, and still the incense hides the altar. The devotees, more numerous with every year that passes by, stand round with drawn swords and compel our homage. Fifty years ago Lord Macaulay acclaimed her "Shakespearean," it is but the other day[1] that Mr. Howells called her "divine." The generous enthusiasm of Macaulay compels us to listen to all that he says. As for Mr. Howells, it must be admitted that *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is as good work as the best of Jane Austen's. So that when a great master accords divine honours to an authoress (sprung from a race that he cordially despises) we must perforce take note of his estimate.

But really: Shakespearean? Divine? Are there any two qualities more entirely lacking to Miss Austen? She was essentially human, with a graceful realism; wholly ladylike and reserved in her treatment of life; a patient and accurate observer of what facts lay around her in one tiny circle. She is a stranger to the Alps and torrents of Shakespearean English. In Miss Austen's landscape there are pleasant grass plots, well-trimmed lawns, and neatly planned hedgerows. There are no acclivities more

[1] In *Criticism and Fiction.*

alarming than those which our grandmothers were wont to tend as "rockeries." Externals count for much with her. The rush and riot of Shakespearean life, its tumultuous passions, its hell-black tragedies, and its glimpses of heavens undreamed of—I do protest that all these things would be vastly improper in Miss Austen's world.

What was Miss Austen's world? Take the world of to-day and eliminate Japan; eliminate China and the South Seas—all Asia, in fact, except India. In Europe eliminate everything except France. For purposes of polite conversation you may include the Rhine. If you have been to Vienna you have travelled. Berlin was a provincial town; there was nothing to see in Russia except the Court and the British Embassy. The chief wonder about Russia was whether the traditions of Peter the Great would be strong enough to enable the Czar to hold together his hordes of barbarians long enough for them to become a nation. Europe, then, consisted of France (the home of the most dangerous principles and the most abominable innovations) and England (called by Providence to keep France in order). If you could allude to a fever caught at Ancona, you showed that you had been in Italy and were probably conversant with the Fine Arts; but socially and politically Italy was dead.

Socially and politically the United States were in puling infancy. South America was a wilderness; Africa and Australia unexplored and in great part undiscovered. Such was Miss Austen's world considered from the geographical point of view—England and France; it is permissible to include the West Indies, which formed a powerful interest at that time.

JANE AUSTEN

From a water colour drawing in the possession of W. Austen Leigh, Esq., originally appearing in "Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends," by Constance Hill

It is very important to remember how small Miss Austen's world was. We are thus saved the annoyance and surprise at finding ourselves called upon to consider seriously the doings of children of seventeen who have never been outside their village. Considering the size of the world at that time, this amounted to experience of the world; while a man who had nearly taken his degree had really done a good deal of what there was for him to do in life. In this thinly populated and obscure corner of the world of to-day Miss Austen's characters lived and moved and had their being. What were Miss Austen's characters? The answer is easy—they were ladies and gentlemen. She herself was a lady, and she wrote like a lady. She saw nothing that a lady might not see; she heard nothing that a lady might not hear; she recorded nothing that a lady might not record. There are little unconscious touches here and there that show how charmingly and winningly ignorant she was of what was really going on around her. These add a zest to what she actually records, for we may be sure that she wrote of nothing that she could not treat with knowledge. There are no attempts to describe, from hearsay, debaucheries with which she was totally unacquainted. There is no low life; there is no high life; there are no fatiguing passages in dialect.

A word on Miss Austen's realism. It is genuine realism; not the bastard realism of later days. According to the school to which we have grown accustomed to allow the monopoly of "realism," nothing exists that is not disgusting. Miss Austen saw more sanely. There were dreadful things in her world, it is true: putrid sore throats, for example; but

also there were many pleasant things. Perhaps she did not take a very wide view of life; but as far as her observation went she saw evenly and recorded fairly.

As to her characters, they all come from one class—the class of gentry, *i.e.* people entitled to bear coat-armour. In the England of to-day, this definition is not precise. There are many gentlemen who are not entitled to bear coat-armour, and *vice versâ*. In Miss Austen's day it really was a social guide. First and foremost in the land were the landed gentry, of which class it might be said with justice that even the peers were no more than its most conspicuous members. This class, so powerful once, of so little account now, settled all social questions. Either you were one of the A's of B——shire, or else your existence required explaining and justifying. You might belong to the professional classes—a very much smaller body of men than the same people nowadays. There was the Church, of course—that was highly respectable—and there was the bar: but attorneys, surgeons, and City people were quite impossible. Physicians, with some reservations, could be known, and the Army would do if you were in the Guards; but the Navy was on a different footing: all sorts of queer people went into the Navy.

These considerations really guided the actions of the people who inhabited Miss Austen's world; and Miss Austen herself recognised the propriety of respecting them. She writes of them as natural and convenient distinctions, and shows no desire to portray ardent human nature struggling against the bonds of convention. On the contrary, *Emma* is the careful study of a young lady who presumes to suppose that the natural distinction existing between ladies and people who are not ladies, can be treated lightly, or

perhaps ignored. There is no passion in her books—it would not be ladylike; and when we admire the felicity of her language and the delicacy of her work, we must recollect that what action there may be moves in a very narrow arena, and that the incidents are trivial and superficial.

Miss Austen's work is eighteenth century in its subject-matter and treatment. She never saw a railway train; and, although much of her life was passed in the nineteenth century, there is not in her pages the faintest echo of its busy and distracted life. She was born in the year 1775, when the coronation of Louis the Sixteenth was a recent event, and she died two years after the battle of Waterloo. She was, therefore, thirty years old when the news of Trafalgar reached England, and forty when Napoleon was overthrown. There are a few references to "the war" in her novels, but you would never suppose that she was referring to a death-struggle between England and France. Although the rivalry of six hundred years culminated in twenty years of conflict corresponding to the twenty years of Miss Austen's literary life, it would appear as if "the war" was of no greater national importance than a war with Ashanti. Were there no illuminations for Camperdown, for the Nile, for St. Vincent, for Trafalgar, for Waterloo? Apparently not. Also apparently Miss Austen never saw an invalid or a pensioner, or met any one in mourning for a relative who had fallen in the service of his country. Also, apparently, nobody ever grumbled at the taxes, although they must have been appallingly heavy, and were borne by the very class which was the object of her studies.

The Napoleonic wars would appear to have been

fought for the purpose of giving young gentlemen in the Army an opportunity for displaying their gay clothes. Also they were useful in enabling young officers of the Navy to gain prize-money, so that they might marry pretty girls and settle down respectably in England. The woes and joys (if these are not too violent expressions for the emotions of Charlottes and Carolines) of very young lovers and very young married people are all that Miss Austen has to write about. The elders form an agreeable background, now thwarting, now sympathising, encouraging, interfering with, or soothing the young people.

Nevertheless, we know that, in point of fact, whatever Miss Austen may have found interesting or the reverse, England was stirred to its depths by the war. Tribulation and mourning were heard throughout the land. The nation was shaken with the sensations of terrible triumphs and terrible disasters. Never was there a more Shakespearean time: not even Shakespeare's own. It is not Miss Austen's fault that she is so very un-Shakespearean. She herself would have been much chagrined had any one ventured on such a comparison in her presence. Or, if she had been in merry mood, she would have "vowed that you were the very drollest creature" or a "shocking quiz."

In fact, if she ever thought of herself and Shakespeare in the same minute, she must have concluded that her only chance of success was to aim at being as unlike him as possible. She called herself, modestly, a miniaturist; and she is credited, as one of her many triumphs, with having destroyed the school of the *Mysteries of Udolpho*.

That novel, no longer read, depends much upon incident. The incidents are all unusual and exciting.

The scene is continually changed, and there are murders amid gloomy surroundings. It had an immense vogue, and was much imitated by writers who thought that with a ghost and a murder and a haunted castle they could make a story. A great many bad stories of this kind were produced, and it certainly was unfortunate that young ladies' heads should be so turned by this tinsel tragedy that they could not stay in a country house without imagining that some disreputable secret haunted the family. *Northanger Abbey* pokes gentle fun at this school of mock romance, although it would perhaps be too much to say that it "destroyed" the school.

Now the claim is that Miss Austen destroyed this school with its unwholesome habit of appealing to the sensational and the melodramatic, and that she did so by showing how really interesting the common events of everyday life might be made to appear.

It may be so, and it may be that this is to her credit: although, after all, what is *Hamlet* but a yarn about a ghost and a murder and a haunted castle? And if it comes to reproaching the sensationalists with too lavish introduction of incident, how does *Hamlet* stand? We have poison, steel, suicide, madness, murder, the wrecking of great kingdoms, battle, and sudden death all in five acts. The play streams with gore. No imitator of Shakespeare was ever so lavish with incident as Shakespeare himself. It is not that the school of writing is bad that insists on a plot with incidents. Mr. Howells would have us believe that it is. Nevertheless, the *Mysteries of Udolpho* is only indifferent work in the school of Shakespeare, and the school which Miss Austen founded — the school of analysis and introspection—is capable of producing

just as tedious work in its way as the *Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Perhaps the people who decry the *Mysteries* have not read that dismal composition. When they have read it they will allow that it is tedious, not because of the fatiguing frequency of improbable incidents, but because of its sentimental tone and wearisome style. In effect the incidents are few, when the vast length of the story is considered. The real superiority of Jane Austen's work lies in her admirable style; the real drawback to enjoying her work is that it is about nothing at all. Whereas the school of the *Mysteries* held that startling incidents (as unlikely as possible) were what a story chiefly needed, and that style and truthfulness signified nothing, Miss Austen, on the contrary, put style and truthfulness first, and avoided romance like the plague. The result is that each of her stories is exactly like the last, and that much of her narrative is hopelessly uninteresting.

It does not matter, for instance, whether Frank Churchill "was most deedily occupied about Mrs. Bates' spectacles"; or that when "Mr. Woodhouse had drank his tea he was ready to go home"; or that Mr. Knightley's boys' "glowing faces showed all the benefit of a country run, and seemed to ensure a quick despatch of the roast mutton and rice pudding they were hastening home for."

Nothing turns on these incidents, and they are not, in themselves, of any importance at all: but (says the devotee) look at the observation of life—the marvellous record of detail! There is, it is true, observation of life; although it does not require exceptional powers of observation to have grasped the fact that children often have roast mutton and rice pudding for dinner,

and that running makes them hungry. There is, it is true, much detail recorded; but it is unimportant detail. It is not the mere accumulation of detail that marks the artist; it is the selection of detail.

This, then, is the point at which we may, after much pondering, pause and contemplate Miss Austen's work with some sense that we approach it intelligently if perhaps clumsily.

Knitting needles are more interesting to her than bayonets, perhaps because she can understand the management of the knitting needle and watch it in action; but she cannot say the same of the bayonet. To a country walk she will devote all her attention; but more exciting incidents are of less value to her and her story.

Sir Thomas Bertram going in person to look after his West Indian estates, and risking capture by French cruisers, is a plucky and interesting figure; but he is not the Sir Thomas whom Miss Austen admires. Sir Thomas, "his mind disengaged from the cares which had pressed on him at first" (putting a stop to some private theatricals) and plunging into the petty gossip of his village; or Sir Thomas, "the life of the party seated round the fire," and, with "the best right to be the talker," becoming "communicative and chatty in a very unusual degree," is the man stripped of all that makes him interesting. Nevertheless this is the Sir Thomas of Miss Austen.

All honour to her for not writing about what she did not understand. All honour to her for not trying to describe an imaginary mutiny at sea, an imaginary conspiracy of the coloured folk, an imaginary tussle with a fraudulent agent, or an imaginary encounter with a French privateer.

Let us not, however, be so far led astray by our admiration for Miss Austen's reticence and veracity that we must needs claim that her subjects are all interesting; because they are not. Incidentally, and as a touch of life and manners, it is important to know that in the intensely respectable circle of Mansfield Park cards and dancing were encouraged, whilst private theatricals were forbidden; but the actual process of stopping the private theatricals is not interesting or amusing or important.

It must have been a dull world, after all. It appears to have been impossible for a gentleman to address words of the commonest civility to a lady without the gentlemen exchanging significant glances, whilst the ladies *rallied* their female friend on the evident *partiality* of dear Bingle for her society. The girls had the minds of odalisques. In childhood and youth they thought and talked all day long of nothing but men, and in maturer years of the men about whom their juniors were talking and thinking. At all ages they gossiped, generally with spiteful intent. If, however, we once relinquish all idea of being interested, and sedulously guide ourselves with the bookmarker which a thoughtful publisher has provided for each volume of the charming edition now before me, we shall find Miss Austen's novels full of information.

Let us take this :—

"The progress of Catherine's unhappiness from the events of the evening was as follows. It appeared first in a general dissatisfaction with everybody about her, while she remained in the rooms, which speedily brought on considerable weariness and a violent desire to go home. This, on arriving in Pulteney Street, took the direction of extraordinary hunger, and when that

was appeased, changed into an earnest longing to be in bed. Such was the extreme point of her distress: for when there she immediately fell into a sound sleep, which lasted nine hours, and from which she awoke perfectly revived, in excellent spirits, with fresh hopes and fresh schemes."

This is dreadful stuff; but it was written in 1798, four years after the appearance of the *Mysteries*, and when sleepless nights were considered appropriate to heroines. Miss Austen was probably thinking of such passages as "all the busy scenes of the past and the anticipated ones of the future came to her anxious mind and conspired with the sense of her new situation to banish sleep"; or "thus passed the night in ineffectual struggles between affection and reason, and she rose in the morning with a mind weakened and irresolute and a frame trembling with illness."

Miss Austen will have none of this. Her heroines are ordinary healthy young women who live the most ordinary lives imaginable, and they are perfectly drawn. Even so Gerard Dou's cats are perfectly painted, even to the very iridescence of their whiskers. They are very bad cats, destitute of all the points that mark the good cat; and one cannot help wondering, was it worth while? Miss Austen in the rage of her mental revolt from the ideal of the sentimental agonised heroine has gone far. Her work has been variously described as "the very smallest of small beer," and as "the rather uninteresting doings and very uninteresting sayings of totally uninteresting people"; she has been called "the prose Wordsworth."

There is much in these comments. Her self-imposed limitations compel her to chronicle small beer, and she chronicles it very industriously; but it

remains small beer. As to the other comments which I have ventured to cite, the root of the matter is this: that the masculine element is altogether lacking in Miss Austen's work. It is, from beginning to end, feminine in tone. To say that "she wrote like a lady" is intended for very high praise, especially when we consider the scandalous rubbish that people professing and calling themselves ladies have been contented to sign; but it implies a restricted range of vision; which, though highly creditable, defines her artistically.

As one result, her portraits of girls and women are more successful than her portraits of men. Her best portraits of men are the portraits of those whose lives were passed in circumstances completely under her observation—stay-at-homes, invalids, and tame cats. All these are admirable. The robuster types are mostly left in shadowy outline.

Her style suffers from restrictions similar to those which she imposed upon herself in regard to incident. Her stories move in a little circle—a country village, a seaport town, Bath—that is all. Her style—when she ruthlessly condemns herself to be dull—can thus be dulness itself; though it can be as dainty and charming as any style in which English is written. These lines, for instance—the opening lines of *Northanger Abbey*:—

"No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her. Her father was a clergyman, without being neglected or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard and he had never been handsome. He had a considerable

independence, besides two good livings, and he was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters."

There are innumerable passages like this which are a pleasure to read, merely for the grace and skill with which the English is handled. It would be idle to attempt to sketch the plot of any one novel, for there is practically no plot in the ten volumes of her works. Some trifling event, a dance or a dinner party, brings her characters together in situations where they can speak and act; and accordingly they speak and act until they separate. The abiding interest of all this charming trifling is the contrast between then and now; the observation of what went to make correct behaviour, correct manners, and correct speech one hundred years ago, in contrast with the speech and manners of to-day.

For example: Mr. Lucas, a tradesman of Meryton, rose to be mayor and became Sir William. The type is familiar; but the way in which Miss Austen speaks of him is remarkable. "For though elated by his rank it did not render him supercilious; on the contrary, he was all attention to everybody. By nature inoffensive, friendly, and obliging, his presentation at St. James's had made him courteous." Mr. Collins, a subservient parson, married Sir William's daughter, and invited Sir William to stay with him. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the patroness of Mr. Collins' living, an impertinent old lady, invited the entire household to dinner, on which Mr. Collins thus expressed himself:—

"'I confess that I should not have been at all surprised by her ladyship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea and spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected, from my knowledge of her affability, that

it would happen. But who could have foreseen such an attention as this? Who could have imagined that we should receive an invitation to dine there (an invitation, moreover, including the whole party) so immediately after your arrival?'

"'I am the less surprised at what has happened,' replied Sir William, 'from that knowledge of what the manners of the great really are, which my situation in life has allowed me to acquire. About the Court, such instances of elegant breeding are not uncommon.'"

The grovelling contentment of the man Collins, the imbecile gratification of Sir William, the massive impertinence of my lady, and the overpowering dulness of the party: which is the most remarkable?

They go to their dreary party, and this is what happens:—

"In spite of having been at St. James's Sir William was so completely awed by the grandeur surrounding him, that he had but just courage enough to make a very low bow, and take his seat without saying a word; and his daughter, frightened almost out of her senses, sat on the edge of her chair, not knowing which way to look."

The situation would be completely reversed to-day. It would be Lady Catherine who would be all civility in the hope of getting some sound financial information from Sir William; while Sir William would be slightly patronising and chiefly occupied in wondering with how cheap a "tip" he could pay for his dinner. As for the young lady, it is impossible to imagine any successful tradesman's daughter "frightened out of her wits" by a whole drawing-room full of Lady Catherines.

Miss Austen's novels are all equally charming; and each is exactly like its predecessor and successor. The titles have very little relation to the contents. *Persuasion* might equally well be called *Dissuasion*, and the whole series could be appropriately named 1, 2, 3, . . . 10, without loss of coherence.

Where, then, are we to place Miss Austen as a novelist? Let us consider what that highly distinguished novelist and critic, Mr. W. D. Howells, has decided, and consider how far his ideas coincide with our own. "The art of fiction, as Jane Austen knew it, declined from her through Scott and Bulwer and Dickens and Charlotte Brontë and Thackeray and even George Eliot."[1]

There is no mistaking enthusiasm of this kind. The highest place is claimed, without any reserve, for Jane Austen. But how about the art of fiction declining from her through Scott and the others?

Surely these eminent men dwelt on different planes. To say that the art of fiction declined . . . in the way that Mr. Howells describes is not a substantial contribution to the inquiry, "Where are we to place Jane Austen?"

It would be as sensible to say that the art of painting as Raphael knew it declined through Michael Angelo and Holbein and Claude and Benjamin West and J. M. W. Turner and even George Du Maurier.

Nor, again, when we read a passage like the following, can we admit that we are much advanced: "How, for instance, could people who had once known the simple verity, the refined perfection of Miss Austen, enjoy anything less refined and less perfect? With

[1] *Criticism and Fiction*, p. 74.

her example before them, why should not English novelists have gone on writing simply, honestly, artistically ever after?"

To ask these questions is merely to ask why, having once tasted sole, we should eat any other fish. There are many reasons: the salmon is less refined than the sole, but he is more sumptuous; the whiting is less perfect than the sole, but he is more dainty. And then as to honesty, *et cetera.* Are all English novelists dishonest, confused, inartistic?

In truth the author of *Criticism and Fiction* would have us take him for a critic; but he is a worshipper; and for the worshipper the thicker the cloud of incense the greater the merit of the act of devotion. We, who want to see the divinity face to face, would fain wait until the incense has arisen past the altar and the air is clear. And we are not to be deterred by being called[1] "poor islanders," or by being told that we have[2] "false theories and bad manners." Clearly we must give up all idea of being guided by Mr. Howells and decide for ourselves.

It need not be very hard. Miss Austen's work is good, but it is monotonous; it is dainty, but it is essentially feminine. We need not go far to find another artist with precisely these limitations in another art. Of whom can we say with truth that her work is graceful, correct, monotonous, and feminine? Obviously the sister artist to Jane Austen is Angelica Kauffmann.

In England a man who does not burn incense must expect to be called an iconoclast; appreciations are not welcomed. As Miss Austen is now in the forefront of fashion, "iconoclast" is probably the mildest

[1] *Criticism and Fiction*, p. 76. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

epithet that will be applied to me. I should not be surprised to find myself acclaimed as the Devil's Advocate. Let us consider, then, what Miss Austen herself recorded of her own limitations. Nothing can be more interesting, for she was the least conceited of mortals and incapable of self-deception. She once received an intimation from an exalted quarter that portraits of learned clergymen would be appreciated. It is what might have been expected. From the way in which the Church is spoken of in her books it is clear that, as an institution, it commanded the respect and affection of the country, and yet the clergymen to whom we are introduced are slight and ordinary creatures. This is not consistent; and it is but natural that Miss Austen's admirers, perceiving how admirably she drew trivial people, should urge her to attempt greater work. She excuses herself in the following terms:—

"I am quite honoured by your thinking me capable of drawing such a clergyman as you gave the sketch of in your note. But I assure you I am not. The comic part of the character I might be equal to, but not the good, the enthusiastic, the literary. Such a man's conversation must at times be on subjects of science and philosophy, of which I know nothing, or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations and allusions, which a woman who, like me, knows only her mother tongue, and has read little in that, would be totally without the power of giving. A classical education or, at any rate, a very extensive acquaintance with English literature, ancient and modern, appears to me quite indispensable for the person who would do any justice to your clergyman; and I think I may boast myself to be with all possible vanity the

most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress."

This diffidence in reply to a very flattering invitation is truly refreshing. Nowadays an author, without receiving any invitation at all, is prepared to "get up" a subject, a city, a language, or an epoch, and to coin his information into shekels of silver (and even of gold) at the shortest notice, and very often does so with sufficient accuracy to deceive the unlearned to his, and their, mutual comfort. Assuredly there is nothing dishonest in the process; on the contrary, it is sound business, and very good business; but then it *is* business and not art. Miss Austen would have none of it, and her refusal to move out of the path where she trod so confidently and gracefully is not only refreshing in itself, but particularly fortifying to one who has ventured to indicate her place in the world of art and who discovers it to be the place that she had chosen for herself.

THE BRONTËS

"DAMN the curate!" "Hell!" "You lie!" "Silence, eavesdropper! Judas! Traitor! Hellish villain!" These violent expressions are from the novel *Wuthering Heights*, published in the year 1847.

They are justified in dignified language by the sister of the authoress. Charlotte Brontë, in her preface to her sister's novel, says:—

"The practice of hinting by single letters words with which profane and violent persons are wont to garnish their discourse, strikes me as a proceeding which, however well meant, is weak and futile. I cannot tell what good it does, what feeling it spares, what horror it conceals."

In effect, the sisters Brontē had great courage, a lofty ideal, and seriousness of purpose.

The question is whether we have not in 1905 arrived at the end of the journey on which we started when Ellis Bell wrote *Wuthering Heights* and Currer Bell championed what struck the reading public of that day as alarming realism. It is not very alarming realism to readers of the twentieth century, for we have left fifty years behind us, days when it was necessary to apologise for unrestrained expressions, and have arrived at the time when, thanks to the Reader of plays, we are spared the exhibition of masterpieces which have nothing else to commend them except the lavish use of unrestrained expressions.

In the enchanting parody of a University Extension lecture introduced by Mr. Andrew Lang in *The Disentanglers*, we have in two bantering phrases at once the limitation and the justification of the Brontës' art: "Impropriety reintroduced by Charlotte Brontë. Unwillingness of lecturer to dwell on this topic. . . . Fallacy of thinking that the novel should amuse."

Precisely. The object of the Brontës' art was didactic; the means employed by them was to avoid any appearance of squeamishness in recording the facts of life as they appeared to the authors. The question for us is not so much whether it is disagreeable to discover in classic pages the language of the streets, or whether one is not rather bored by encountering a sermon where one expected to find relaxation, but rather—are the means which everybody extols as indispensable to the ends of true art really indispensable?

Of course what Ellis Bell was trying to do was to present us with an accurate picture of the savage and violent life that lay about her, and she could find no better way of doing this than by faithfully recording the violent language in which her characters were accustomed to indulge.

Was her method a success?

It is a partial success if she has succeeded in making her characters alive, even at the expense of employing this questionable method. It is not even a partial success if she has merely recorded violent language without enabling us to realise the violent characters. An artist certainly as great as Ellis Bell came face to face with the same difficulty forty years after the appearance of *Wuthering Heights*. Before the appear-

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ance of *Treasure Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to Mr. Henley: "Two chapters are written, and have been tried on Lloyd with great success; the trouble is to work it off without oaths. Buccaneers without oaths—bricks without straw. But youth and the fond parient have to be consulted."

Well, *Treasure Island* was produced—buccaneers without oaths—and surely no more vital characters were ever produced by a great artist. There is not one single violent expression in *Treasure Island*, and yet the impression of ruthless, savage, bloodthirsty villainy is complete, convincing, terrible.

Here we have matter for consideration which may enable us without dogmatising to see whether the naturalistic method really deserves the unchallenged supremacy which our generation, though now somewhat reluctantly, still accords it. If John Silver and "that brandy-faced rascal" Israel Hands and George Merry and Morgan can be made to live and terrify us, without the aid of one single expletive, where is the compulsion that Ellis Bell found so urgent? The conclusion surely is that Stevenson was a great artist, and Ellis Bell was not a great artist.

In fact, the habit of relying upon violent expressions to produce violent effects is closely akin to the habit of relying upon italics in composition, which is one of the first weaknesses an author has to overcome. If it were merely an inappropriate monosyllable that one found trying, there would perhaps be little to say, but the free employment of coarse words is not an accident, but only a rather unimportant incident, in a system which has ceased to produce good results.

What, then, shall we say are the abiding merits of the works of the sisters Brontë?

Firstly, their abounding human sympathy; secondly, the infinite patience and conscientiousness with which they observe and record the facts of life. They interested themselves in people as human beings; they did not think it necessary that they should be wealthy or important or adventurous or exceptional in any way whatever. Clods and ruffians and bores and dowdies, among whom their lives were passed, are drawn with accuracy. The authoress accepts her clods and dowdies as interesting people, which is a tribute to her own wide sympathy, but she expects her readers to find these people interesting merely because they are accurately reproduced. George Eliot could do this because she was a mighty artist; but one yawns over *Wuthering Heights*, because, although Ellis Bell's sympathies are wide, her style correct, and her intentions excellent, she is not a great artist.

There, however, is precisely where her champions would take up her case, and tell me that it is I whose sympathies are narrow and whose sense of art is defective, and not Ellis Bell.

That is quite fair; but for my own part, after painstakingly reading the whole of *Wuthering Heights*, I cannot distinguish the Christian names of the characters from their surnames, or one character from another, male or female, or make out what is the story, who is telling it, or what all the anxiety is about; nor can I carry my attention from one page to the next without a strong effort of will. Yet hardly had I laid aside this tedious production, when a lady told me that she had just read *Wuthering Heights* for five hours at a stretch, and been only able to lay it down because she was compelled to dress for dinner.

This is a severe shock to one's convictions, and

drives one to the conclusion that there are men's authors and women's authors: to a few, only a very few, is it given to appeal to all mankind. Ellis Bell was assuredly not one of these.

"*Wuthering Heights*," wrote her sister, "is hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely material." This is true, and greatly to the credit of the authoress. But what so many writers of the calibre of Ellis Bell overlook is the fact that inexperience is not necessarily genius. Byron's contempt for "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease" was only the characteristic expression of a justifiable impatience with people who clamour for our attention to unfinished work. Perhaps the shade of Ellis Bell will not feel affronted if I quote Sheridan's advice to a young writer when he bade him remember that "easy writing is damned hard reading"; but there again, easy writing may—does—produce that impression upon me, but not by any means upon most ladies who read *Wuthering Heights*. The mountains of detail, the solemn periods, the faithfully reproduced jargon of the peasant, all the other features of Ellis Bell's work, are great recommendations to many readers. They enjoy losing themselves in detail; they admire the accuracy of the dialect; the lack of anything resembling humour is no drawback to their enjoyment.

To my mind it is very depressing to think that all this excellent material, these high intentions, this dogged industry, should be wasted; and, without wishing to dogmatise, may one not profitably recall the severe training that Thackeray underwent, and the terrible self-imposed discipline of George Eliot's mind, before their matchless powers were developed to the full? All this was wanting to Ellis Bell. It was not

wholly her fault, but still it is wanting; although, in the circumstances of her life, she wrought wonders.

There remains the question whether she would have had the patience to submit to discipline. Probably not, for the ideal which she set before her did not call for discipline. She "wished" to "write what she saw," and she would probably have urged that drilling the mind destroys its freshness and spontaneity. One can only infer this from the nature of her work, but the phrase is often used and is responsible for much conceited laziness and stupidity.

If one would see how much may be done towards improvement of style, and consequent success in art, in the most untoward circumstances, one need only turn to *Agnes Grey*, a work produced in the year 1847, by Acton Bell.

Here we have dissolute squires and vulgar *nouveaux riches* presented, and convincingly presented, in a style which Stevenson himself could not but have approved.

The story is the familiar one of a young lady whose family misfortunes compelled her to earn her own living at the age of eighteen. Agnes Grey is the full and attractive portrait of a type of which Ruth Pinch was but a sketch. We should hardly have realised Ruth Pinch in all her attractiveness without the help of Fred Barnard, but Agnes Grey is higher art.

It is needless to say that the incidents in the story of *Agnes Grey* are in themselves tedious and dismal. The daily routine of a poor girl leading the arduous and depressing life of a governess in families where she was despised can hardly be anything else; but the story is so connectedly told, and the incidents are presented so soberly and touched so lightly, that

the impression is great. Nothing is overdone: there is sufficient dialect to divert, not enough to weary. The children of both of the families Agnes Grey served stand out each from the other like living beings. The good men are not tiresome, the wicked men are not melodramatic.

There could be no greater contrast to *Wuthering Heights* than *Agnes Grey*.

In the one case the machinery is lavish, the scenery startling, and there is a wild abandon of language, which, if licence could effect anything, ought to result in a horrifying impression, but the impression is *nil:* in the other case we have nothing but the bread and butter of life, but the impression is great.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, by Anne Brontë (or "Acton Bell"), is a much neglected book. It suffers from the slight drawback of being a story within a story, which always fatigues the attention; otherwise the construction is good. The famous incident of the brother who is mistaken for the lover was probably more or less novel sixty years ago; but the consequences of the mistake lead up to scenes which disclose a very curious confusion of ideas. The hero of the book is supposed to show no more than manly displeasure when he strikes the brother with a loaded crop and nearly murders him. The unhappy victim is, of course, extremely ill. The murderer "left him to live or die as he could," overwhelming him with foul abuse; all which does not appear to have been a bar to quite a cheery friendship when the little mistake was cleared up. This is perhaps creditable to the temper of both parties, who conduct themselves with manly and criminal violence as gentlemen ought to do.

Their conduct throughout was based upon a misconception from beginning to end. In another part of the story a prominent character, Lord Lowborough, really suffers a very deep injury at the hands of one who was formerly his friend, and is applauded for declining to demand satisfaction, in the manner customary among gentlemen, in the following interview:—

"'Name time and place, and I will manage the rest,' says the would-be second.

"'That,' answered the more low deliberate voice of Lord Lowborough, 'is just the remedy my heart, or the devil within it, suggested—to meet him and not to part without blood. Whether I or he should fall, or both, it would be an inexpressible relief if——'

"'Just so. Well then?'

"'Oh!' exclaimed his lordship, with deep and determined emphasis. 'Though I hate him from my heart, and should rejoice at any calamity that could befall him, I leave him to God; and though I abhor my own life, I leave that too to Him who gave it.'

"'But you see in this case——' pleaded Hattersley.

"'I will not hear you,' exclaimed his companion, hastily turning away. 'Not another word. I have enough to do against the fiend within me——'

"'Then you are a white-livered fool, and I wash my hands of you,' grumbled the tempter, as he swung himself round and departed.

"'Right! right! Lord Lowborough,' cried I, darting out and clasping his burning hand as he was moving away. 'I begin to think that the world is not worthy of you.'"

Verily the ways of English gentlemen must seem mysterious to gentlemen of other nations accustomed

to more rigid codes of honour. A violent and criminal assault on an unarmed man is hardly condemned, but a stand-up fight is a temptation of the devil. Sir Walter Besant humorously explained the abolition of the duel on the ground that men found it simply intolerable to have to rise at five o'clock in the morning for such an uncomfortable purpose. One may with equal seriousness reason that the duel as a satisfaction of honour was reprobated by public opinion, because public opinion came to be the opinion of people to whom the idea of honour was unintelligible.

Apart from this somewhat startling confusion of ideas, there is much in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that interests, much that is even absorbing in its interest, but one sees here and there the first appearance of catchwords that may have been seriously meant at the time, but that have not always been useful.

The teaching of the book is on the familiar lines, namely, that "one should be one's self," and "speak right out," and all the kindred exhortations to awkward manners and disagreeable remarks.

The heroine is one of those blameless people who have served as a model for so many imitators. Blameless herself, she is in a perpetual attitude of reminding all around her of their duty, while weeping hot tears over her curly-headed little boy. Of course she despises clothes, and of course her husband is everything that he ought not to be; although, if one comes to think of it, it could not have been very agreeable, even to the best of husbands, to find the young lady keeping a diary of his married life in which all his peccadilloes were set forth in excellent style and

with much *verve*. Of course she runs away, and the husband dies repentant but despairing, while she comforts his last moments.

Equally, of course, Society is decried, and the country life extolled. This is how Mr. and Mrs. Huntingdon enjoy London :—

"He led me such a round of restless dissipation while there that in that short space of time I was quite tired out. He seemed bent upon displaying me to his friends and acquaintances in particular and the public in general on every possible occasion at the greatest possible advantage. It was something to feel that he considered me a worthy object of pride, but I paid dear for the gratification. For, in the first place, to please him I had to violate my cherished predilections, my almost rooted principles in favour of a plain, dark, and sober style of dress. I must sparkle in costly jewels and deck myself out like a painted butterfly, just as I had long since determined I would never do; and all this was no trifling sacrifice."

The obvious comment that occurs to one is this—that perhaps if the young lady had not been so exacting about trifles, and so unreasonably reluctant to accept the small things of life as they came, and so determined to see nothing in life except sitting about in the country doing nothing and keeping a diary of her husband's shortcomings, perhaps her husband would not have taken to drink. We are to remember that the young lady came of a considerable family, was an heiress herself, and now married to a young man with a large establishment and the usual prosperous and dignified surroundings of a country gentleman in the great days of English agriculture. It is therefore only reasonable that her husband should

have liked her to wear the family jewels; and a "plain, dark, and sober style of dress," which would be the very thing for housekeeping in the morning in the country, is not the right thing for the opera. In short, the young lady did not know how to dress and would not be taught.

This is the obverse of the medal, and here is the reverse:—

"Mr. Huntingdon discovered his wife keeping her diary and said, 'With your leave, my dear, I will have a look at this.' . . . And drawing a chair to the table composedly, sat down and examined it, turning leaf after leaf to find an explanation of what he had read. . . . Of course I didn't leave him to pursue this occupation in quiet. I made several attempts to snatch the book from his hands, but he held it too firmly for that. I upbraided him in bitterness and scorn for his mean and dishonourable conduct, but that had no effect upon him. And finally I extinguished both the candles, but he only wheeled round to the fire, and, raising a blaze sufficient for his purpose, calmly continued the investigation. I had serious thoughts of getting a pitcher of water and extinguishing that light too, but it was evident that his curiosity was too keenly excited to be quenched by that. . . . Besides, it was too late. 'It seems very interesting, love,' said he; . . . 'but as it is rather long, I will look at it some other time, and meanwhile I will trouble you for your keys, my dear.'"

This is meant to be tragedy, but there has been no more screaming farce in real life since the matrimonial difficulties of Count and Countess Rumford.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is undoubtedly a very interesting story, but the idealisation of these un-

restrained and dubious manners is unfortunate in itself, and has had an unfortunate effect upon the English mind.

It is curious that a family should have existed and presented to the world of letters three remarkable specimens of the same type. If we take up any one work of the Brontë sisters it will be extremely difficult even for a practised critic to say to which of the three sisters the work should be ascribed. In each case we find the same microscopic accuracy of detail, the same indifference as to whether the detail is unimportant or not, the same laudable determination to see the soul of the character through all untoward externals, the same incapacity to grasp the fact that in order to make an impression details must be most carefully sifted and most artfully arranged, the same lack of humour and the same gallant disregard of convention, even of such literary convention as is very convenient and cannot be disregarded with impunity by the most reckless scribes. In short, we have all the elements of the naturalistic school of novelists, not excepting Mr. Andrew Lang's humorous conclusion, "The novel is the proper vehicle of theological, scientific, social, and political instruction."

Villette, by Currer Bell (or Charlotte Brontë), is a book in which one is alternately exasperated by pointless detail and rewarded for one's patience by positive flashes of insight.

"The cook, in a jacket, a short petticoat, and sabots, brought me supper, to wit, some meat, nature unknown, served in an odd and acid but pleasant sauce; some chopped potatoes made savoury with I know not what, vinegar and sugar, I think: a tartine or slice of

bread and butter and a baked pear. Being hungry, I ate and was grateful."

Naturally, and one has eaten many worse meals. If this is a letter of a young lady to her parents after her first experience of Continental cooking, one would say it showed promise; being inserted into a grave and didactic narrative, it produces the impression of mere padding. It reminds one of Mr. George Moore's criticism of the late M. Zola, "Ce que je reproche à Zola c'est qu'il n'a pas de style." He proceeds to illustrate this by pointing out that passages worthy of Pascal and Bossuet rub shoulders with police news and downright padding. The Brontë sisters never rise to M. Zola's heights or sink to his depths. They may be described as the Caraccisti of the naturalistic school: not that the parallel is exact, for they were hardly uninspired and they certainly were not experts; but they do hold an unchallenged position of mediocre attainment which never sinks into baseness, and here and there really invades the realm of excellence.

Villette, for example, although dwelling in tedious circumstances, is very faithful work. Even Brontë lovers admit that it is dull. It suffers like all the Brontë novels from the impression of self-consciousness which may or may not have been the just reflection of the ladies' minds, but it cannot be shaken off when we find the entire book occupied with the impression made upon the writer by the most trivial incidents of everyday life, and by introspection which may have been original sixty years ago, but seems quite childish to us now. Of course the most famous of all the Brontë novels is *Jane Eyre*. In this interesting work we find the fervour

of Mr. Andrew Lang's enchanting mock lecture in full blast, "The novel is the proper vehicle of theological, scientific, social, and political instruction."

In order to make this quite clear to her readers, "Currer Bell" has prefaced *Jane Eyre* with a dedication to Mr. Thackeray and a few words expounding her principles. She says, writing on the 21st of December 1847:—

"There is a man in our own days whose words are not framed to tickle delicate ears, who, to my thinking, comes before the great ones of society much as the son of Imlah came before the throned kings of Judah and Israel, and who speaks truth as deep, with a power as prophet-like and as vital, a mien as dauntless and as daring. Is the satirist of *Vanity Fair* admired in high places? I cannot tell. But I think that if some of those among whom he hurls the Greek fire of his sarcasm, and over whom he flashes his levin brands, were to take his warnings in time, they or their seed might yet escape a fatal Ramoth-gilead."

It is a far cry from Ramoth-gilead to Cornhill, and there is this material difference between the prophet Micaiah and Mr. Thackeray, namely, that the prophet Micaiah did not publish his prophesyings and build a handsome house from the proceeds. Not that Mr. Thackeray was not perfectly entitled to all, and more than all, of the rewards of his industry and genius; but really: Micaiah and Mr. Thackeray—is not the parallel somewhat strained? And what is all this about Greek fire and levin brands? Is it not to take the novel much too seriously? What have we to do with Greek fire and levin brands when we sit down to be amused for an hour? There again we run

our heads against the dictum—"Fallacy of thinking that the novel should amuse."

Now the failure of *Jane Eyre* as a work of art lies precisely in this attempt to wield the levin brand and also to amuse us at the same time.

The purpose of the authoress is eminently didactic; the means of enforcing her conclusions are the simple ones of a narrative of love and tragedy, but the melodrama is painfully mechanical; and as for the love, well, let us see what it was.

We are introduced to a character of the later Byronic type—a dark-haired, strong-jawed voluptuary, who commands wealth and all that wealth can buy in a world which is still extremely agreeable for wealthy people. We are given to understand that an unhappy married life has driven this saturnine person to the usual consolations of a vigorous and melancholy maturity. At the age of forty he casts the eyes of regard upon a plain, poor, plain-spoken, dull governess, and we are also given to understand that this virtuous young person arouses in him a passion so deep that all considerations are swept away in the torrent of his emotion, and not even the penalties of bigamy will deter him from the gratification of his desires.

There is nothing impossible in all this, because there is nothing impossible in human nature, but it is so wildly improbable that one is justified in describing a melodrama under the circumstances as purely mechanical. As regards the claim of the authoress to reform or chastise or instruct her generation, it is a claim that has been put forward in the last fifty years by so many people that we can hardly avoid the inquiry, has it any justification?

We may safely say that the immense mass of

professedly didactic fiction that has been published since the appearance of *Jane Eyre* has really modified the ideas of two generations. It has had an influence such as might be expected. That is to say, it has impressed the minds of two half-educated generations with the convictions of several educated people.

The assumption of the prophetic attitude is merely ridiculous to any one with a grain of humour; and on the whole one can only say that the influence of fiction when it has deserted its proper province of amusement and relaxation has been wholly pernicious. It has engendered among the ignorant and half-educated a conceited dogmatical habit of thought which is extremely disagreeable to encounter, and is the source of endless misery to the people who are so unfortunate as to possess it.

"Currer Bell" need not have been anxious as to the reception of *Vanity Fair* in high places; it was incontestably received with delight and admiration—as a work of fiction. If it did not exactly shake a throne or reform a selfish and voluptuous aristocracy, perhaps that is because there really is a substantial difference between Micaiah and Mr. Thackeray.

Yet this mechanical melodrama and painfully didactic composition was received with delight by a generation of readers who are to-day no longer young. Some will say that this is in consequence of the development of the critical faculty; others will maintain that there is no surer sign of our literary decadence than the waning interest in the works of the Brontë sisters.

The Professor tells a plain tale. It gains by not attempting to teach us anything. The didactic element

is wanting; unless we are to infer that to make all the blunders possible in life is to show strength of character. The hero of the story has highly placed connections on both sides. He is sent to Eton, and is then offered the alternative of being pushed forward in the public service by the influence of the generous relatives who paid his school expenses, or of looking out for himself. Common gratitude, as well as common sense, would appear to suggest that the hero should become an *attaché* in the diplomatic service or something like that; but he does not like his relatives' manners, so he decides to throw himself on the tender mercies of his brother, who is making a large fortune as a manufacturer.

All this may be very fine and manly, but one would suppose that the natural inclination of a young man who had been ten years at Eton would not be towards drudgery in a mill. Here again one cannot help noting the tendency of all the Brontë sisters to produce their effects somewhat mechanically. Given a young man of leisure and culture and natural refinement set down to be a clerk to a miserly bully, and you get the most distressing situations. The most distressing situations supervene, and the hero, having quarrelled with the people who naturally would have helped him, is now compelled to quarrel with the people who regard him as a poor relation. Finally he lands himself as an usher in a school in Belgium.

All the rest is pretty story-telling; the heroine being the usual Brontë heroine—a deserving governess. The incidents are what one might expect, but one is no longer impatient with them when one is not expected to draw any disciplinary conclusions from them. One is content to admire the grace and ease

with which they are told, and does not trouble one's head about the monotony of the story or the exaggerated prominence given to uninteresting people.

Readers who enjoy *Wuthering Heights* will naturally revel in *Shirley*, a story of very great length. It is difficult to say anything more, for if one were to add that it is very tiresome as well as very long, one would assuredly find one's self contradicted by an eager reader who had studied it for five consecutive hours.

The heroine is a nice, high-spirited girl, who is possessed of a considerable independence. Having been badly brought up, or rather not brought up at all, the consequence is that she affects "the leopardess," is fond of describing herself as "untamed," and throws convention to the winds.

The portraits of the three curates are celebrated in many appreciative notices of *Shirley*, but are really, although admirable in their way, quite the least important part of the book. They are the portraits of three very vulgar young men. There were vulgar young men in Holy Orders fifty years ago: there are vulgar young men in Holy Orders to-day, only too many.

In *Shirley* we find the characteristics of independence and self-reliance extolled at the expense of all other mental qualities. When the world was half empty, men possessed of this mental equipment, and nothing more, could do much.

Mr. Charles Kingsley added the cold bath and a devotion to field sports, and beyond that, many Englishmen have been accustomed to conclude, manliness cannot go.

"The Squirradical" was "wooden spoon" in the year 1850, and a very grotesque and pathetic figure

he made in 1890. No doubt he would have been to "Currer Bell" a very earnest young man.

As the world has filled, and the conduct of life grown more and more complicated, this ideal has come to be more and more disastrous to the people who cherish it. Good intentions, honesty, and courage are much. Unfortunately, the teaching of the *Shirley* school of thought tends to engender the companion conviction that anybody can do anything somehow, and that it does not much matter how things are done. The conviction found its most famous expression in the imbecile vaunt ascribed to Lord John Russell, that he would take the command of the Channel Fleet if he were ordered to assume that responsible position. This is quoted with approval, and even with enthusiasm, by numerous people who might be suspected of knowing better, as the last expression of that devotion to duty which ought to animate the Englishman in public life.

These may seem somewhat solemn reflections. Perhaps in the very making of them one is continuing the error of those who take the novel too seriously; but let us go back to our mock University Extension lecturer and quote once more—"The novel is now the whole of literature. . . . People have no time to read anything else. Study of the novel becomes an abuse if it leads to neglect of the morning and evening newspapers."

Although this is said banteringly, it is hardly an exaggeration. Politics have lost their interest since intelligence was swamped in numbers. History has subsided into a thing of text-books, which nobody reads unless compelled to do so for the purpose of passing examinations. Conversation is extinct.

Consequently it is not unfair to ascribe to the novel a considerable share in moulding and directing the public opinion of the time.

The widely read and deeply studied novels of the Brontë sisters must have had a great influence; an influence growing stronger as other engines for directing public thought wear out.

The school of thought which lays it down that form is essential, that perfection should be aimed at, that slovenliness and disregard of authority is a blemish in otherwise sound work, that maintains that reverence is due to all thought and to all work, whether remunerative or not—this school still lives, if it languishes, in one great seat of learning; and this is the school to which the Brontë influence, whether for good or for ill, is antagonistic.

W. M. THACKERAY

THE great name of William Makepeace Thackeray recalls a whole literature. His place is assured, if not defined, and the ready mental classification which passes with us for criticism has at least decided that Mr. Thackeray's works must be placed in the same room, if not on the same shelf, as the works of Shakespeare. The two men have much in common. Both matured late, and both died early—at the age of fifty-two. Both men took all mankind for their study. It is as fair to speak of the "pell-mell of the men and women of Thackeray" as it is to speak, as Matthew Arnold did, of the "pell-mell of the men and women of Shakespeare."

We are permitted to criticise Shakespeare and other giants, but we are not permitted to criticise Mr. Thackeray. We may say that Milton had no sense of humour, or that Michael Angelo was no colourist; we may limit the empire of Tennyson's genius by saying that his dramas will not move; we may say that Guido Reni was an uninspired expert; and that Turner could not draw the figure; but we may not criticise Mr. Thackeray. In all provinces of his art he must be admitted to be as perfect as the strolling players of *Hamlet*. Yet one hesitates to accept the judgment which two generations of Mr. Thackeray's adorers have imposed on mankind.

Milton and Turner and Michael Angelo were as great men in their way as Mr. Thackeray, and we have found some limitation to the genius of each one of them. Let us, then, find some point of view from which we can regard Mr. Thackeray with complete mental detachment, and see if there be any bounds to the empire of his genius; not that we may admire the less, but that we may admire the more; that we may renounce gaping and inarticulate astonishment, and exchange it for intelligent admiration and intelligent delight.

It being already postulated that Mr. Thackeray is perfect, it will naturally be denied that such a point of view exists. So we cannot even take up our point of view without a struggle. If, however, Mr. Thackeray is perfect, his artistic perfection will be apparent from any point of view. Let us, then, place ourselves in the twenty-second century, and, looking back, inquire, "How far did Mr. Thackeray represent the social life of his century?" This question is highly contentious, for, if Thackeray was nothing else, he was a keen social observer, and, insomuch as his narrative style was as near perfection as possible, all the conditions would appear to be fulfilled. Let it be so; we will, then, contemplate perfection from the distance of two hundred years, and see how it looks.

The social life of any century is made up of men and women and institutions. In any century of English history an early question, if not the first question, must be, What was the position of the Church? We can hardly do better, to begin with, than inquire how far Mr. Thackeray's presentation of the Church is trustworthy. There are many clergymen in his six novels. These are some of them: the Rev. Mr. Crisp (fresh

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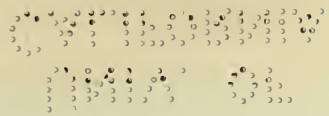
(From a drawing by Samuel Lawrence, in the possession of Mrs. Anthony Trollope)



from Oxford), the Rev. Otto Rose, the Rev. Mr. Shamble, "an erratic Anglican divine, hired for the season at places of English resort, and addicted to debts, drinking, and even roulette"; the Rev. Tufton Hunt, of whom we read, "the tipsy parson reeled from bar to bar"; the Rev. Mr. Muffin, the Rev. Mr. Flowerdew, the Rev. Bute Crawley, the Rev. Silas Hornblower, the Rev. Mr. Tuffin, the Rev. Mr. Trail (Bishop of Ealing—note the suggestion of crawling and wriggling), the Venerable Archdeacon Trumper (a great whist player), the Rev. Laurence Veal, the Rev. Felix Rabbits, the Rev. Mr. Muff (travelling on the Continent with Milor Noodle). Nonconforming creeds have their representatives: the Rev. Giles Jowls, the illuminated cobbler, and the Rev. Luke Waters, a mild Wesleyan. One might extend the list considerably, but it is safe to affirm that there are no clerical names (except that of Laura Bell's father) in Mr. Thackeray's novels that do not carry a meaning either ludicrous or discreditable. We have incidents producing the same effect, such as "turtle and champagne fit for an Archbishop," or the delight which Fred Bayham's uncle the Bishop took in hearing his nephew imitate people being sick at sea; but we have no incident reflecting anything but dishonour on the Church, except perhaps in the "Haunt" there was a "fellow of very kind feeling who has gone into the Church since." It will be rejoined that these are trifles—straws: granted, although there are a good many straws, and they all blow in the same direction; and we have, in addition, six full-length portraits of clergymen. The Church of the nineteenth century is represented by the Rev. Charles Honeyman and the Rev. Tufton Hunt. Charles Honeyman was the perfect

type of the clerical humbug. He was untruthful, shifty, luxurious, and half-educated. To associate the idea of sacred functions with such a man, or with any of the other five men whose portraits Mr. Thackeray has given in full, is mere profanation. The Rev. Tufton Hunt was a criminal, a blackmailer, and a drunkard. The Rev. Bute Crawley, an underbred, ignorant man, noisily vaunted his birth and position, drank too much, backed his foolish opinions on horseflesh and lost heavily. He could not have been anything but a burden to his family and his parish, and a discredit to his calling. The Church of the nineteenth century sprang from that of the eighteenth century, which is represented by Parson Sampson, domestic chaplain to the Castlewood family. Parson Sampson was everything that a priest ought not to be. He was a gossip, a gambler (not a very honest gambler), a sycophant, not without good nature, but wholly a worldling — a clumsy English version of the pre-Revolutionary Abbé.

The Church of the seventeenth century is represented by the Rev. Robert Tusher, an even more unworthy priest than Parson Sampson. Dr. Tusher was a boorish creature, clumsily and unsuccessfully amorous, pompous, ignorant, and underbred. His son (who was at Cambridge with Henry Esmond) had a long and successful career owing to his undignified complacency in consenting to marry a lady of high birth but damaged reputation. His character is given in one matchless touch : "he accepted the Thirty-Nine Articles with all his heart, and would have signed and sworn to other nine and thirty with entire obedience."

If, then, we are to imagine (say) a candidate for

examination replying (some time in the twenty-second century) to the question: "What was the status of the English Church in the nineteenth century as seen in Mr. Thackeray's works?" his answer may be not unreasonably foretold in the following words: "The English Church in the nineteenth century was officered by incompetent and underbred men. The prelates were men destitute of taste, of gross habits and worldly ideals (examples—the Bishop of Ealing, the Bishop of Bullocksmithy, Fred Bayham's uncle), and the rank and file were either foolish drudges or men of second-rate capacity who entered the Church with the view of advancing themselves in life (examples in plenty). The Church of the nineteenth century is further represented as springing by natural development from the disorderly institutions of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. Charles Honeyman is the feeble descendant of the Sampsons and Tushers, who were themselves the last expression of sturdy vulgarity."

Now let us imagine that the candidate is being examined orally upon his own paper. "I perceive, sir," the examiner may be presumed to say, "that you have studied Mr. Thackeray's novels with some attention. I infer from your answer that the Church in the nineteenth century was in the last stage of decadence. It probably maintained a sort of position by expending the revenues laid up for it in pious times, but was wholly without influence on the life of the nation?"

"By no means. It was probably never more flourishing. Countless new and beautiful churches, with at least one beautiful cathedral, were built."

"That may be; but from what resources?" "From the subscriptions of the faithful." "Do you

mean that the English people supported the English Church?" "Enthusiastically." "They must have been a pitiful set of hounds?" "Not at all; whatever else was lacking to the Englishman of the nineteenth century, he was not lacking in vigour and in courage." "Explain yourself, sir, pray." "I merely state the facts. There were two great centres of spiritual life in England in the nineteenth century—Oxford and Clapham. The devotees of the Clapham school of thought had a burning sense of the intimate relationship of man and his Creator. They held firmly to the responsibility of man, for every action of his life, to the Almighty. This perfectly genuine conviction produced a strenuous attitude in the affairs of daily life, which gave rise to the sneer that piety and profit went hand in hand. (Mr. Thackeray is careful to point out that Mr. Newcome refused a baronetcy because the Quaker connection would not like it.) They were ardent supporters of missionary effort. Perhaps those efforts were not always very successful, but they represented much honest Christian endeavour. Mr. Thackeray was aware of all this, and has given, as usual, all that was ludicrous or discreditable in missionary effort in his allusions to the mission to the Cocoanut Indians and to the Quashyboos, to the society for providing the Fiji Islanders with warming-pans, and in the parodied hymn:—

> "'Lead us to some sunny isle
> Yonder in the western deep,
> Where the skies for ever smile
> And the blacks for ever weep.'

The Clapham devotees were little sensible to external beauty; they worshipped in ugly buildings, and

derided the Apostolical Succession. The tendency of the age gradually told against them, and in favour of the Oxford school, which was of a different type, though not possessed of greater fervour.

"The Oxford school maintained the tradition of divinely descended gifts through the episcopate from the Redeemer Himself. Consequently it had a proud and vivid consciousness of the bygone glories of the Church, and gladly studied the record of deceased and almost forgotten saints. (Mr. Thackeray chooses as illustrations the funny names of Botibol and Willibald, and alludes sarcastically to the 'Feast of Saint So-and-so or the Vigil of Saint What-d'ye-call-'im.') It believed, even more fervently than the Clapham school, in the efficacy of prayer. (We are informed that Lord Rosherville's daughter turned her cupboard into an oratory.) It pressed into the service of God every art and every talent of man; calling for the best from all men. The consequence was a revival of many arts. Working in stone, marble, and wood, and in the base and precious metals, stained glass, architecture itself, received from the Church an incalculable impetus. The officers of the Church of all schools were worthy of inspiring so many and great efforts. Illustrious contributions to every branch of knowledge were made by Churchmen. Kingsley and Arnold influenced profoundly the lives of millions of English-speaking people: Stanley probably influenced as many. The unsung devotion of thousands of town and country clergy often merited canonisation itself."

"There is nothing of all this in Mr. Thackeray's novels." "Nothing whatever: there is nothing there except what was ludicrous or discreditable." "I infer then, sir, that so far as the Church is concerned

Mr. Thackeray's work is not in your opinion representative of the nineteenth century?" "What he wrote was true; very likely his characters were portraits. But if we ask 'Does he represent the century?' we can only conclude that his picture of the Church is one of those half-truths which are so much more damaging than downright falsehoods."

If the Church is the only institution of the nineteenth century which receives damaging treatment at the hand of Mr. Thackeray, it would be fair to conclude that this great man had some special animosity to the Church. Before accepting this conclusion, however, let us see what Mr. Thackeray's views of other nineteenth-century institutions may be. In contrast to the Church question (which is always highly controversial) let us consider the British Empire in India. There is very little controversy possible about this, the most romantic and astonishing episode in history. It is the work firstly of the Army, and secondly of the Covenanted Civil Service of India. The work of the latter body of men is totally misunderstood in England: and not unnaturally misunderstood. The eminent men who labour in the ranks of the Civil Service leave England early in life. They are immediately saddled with duties of overwhelming importance. They spend their lives in discharging these duties, and return to their native land in early middle life. Conscious of abilities far above the average, with a record of great work behind them and a lifetime ahead, they nevertheless find themselves completely out of touch with life. They speak almost a different language from the men around them. Unrecognised by the State or by society, they subside soured, yet pathetic, into insignificance. Yet these

inarticulate and unromantic aliens in the land of their birth have been the conservators, and in some cases the architects, of the British Empire in India.

Mr. Thackeray was in a position to interpret the mighty Civil Service to the public which owes it so much, for he himself sprang from a great Anglo-Indian family, and he has presented the world with two immortal portraits. To the immense majority of English-speaking people the Civil Service of India will for ever be identified with the figures of James Binnie and the Collector of Boggley Wollah. Let us consider them. Jos Sedley would be a disgrace to any service. Gross, cowardly, vain, ignorant, and awkward, he is a figure at once ludicrous and discreditable. James Binnie is, assuredly, not a discredit to his service; but there is something extremely ludicrous (as Binnie himself used to say) in the investiture with solemn judicial functions of a cheery little Scot fond of his dinner and his rupees, who might just as well have been in any other profession, and who (as a matter of fact) very nearly went into the Church. If the British Empire depended on the support of Binnies and Sedleys it would, assuredly, rest on very feeble foundations. It is here as in the case of the Church. There were plenty of incidents and figures in both of these great institutions that were ludicrous or discreditable, or both: but there were countless others which were neither one nor the other. We are not permitted to assume that Mr. Thackeray's range of observation was limited in either case. For the last fifteen years of his life he was a great social figure; everybody was proud to know him, and felt justly honoured by his company: while as for Anglo-India, it was in his very blood.

It must be concluded that in both cases he did not care to portray what was noble or illustrious: it must have passed before his eyes, but it did not interest him.

Let us approach the Irish Question: a sad series of misunderstandings. The Irish Question produced a long line of tragedies in the England of the nineteenth century; from the first year of the century to the last it was an embarrassment and sometimes a terror. There never was a year during those hundred years when some orator was not calling for "Justice to Ireland." There never was a year when the brutal, blundering Saxon was not denounced as the oppressor of a gentler and higher type. There never was a year when Englishmen were not given to understand that sympathy and not force was the true solution of the relation of Celt and Saxon. How far this is true is another question. There are those who maintain that there is no race more capable of taking care of itself than the Irish, and that the century-long howls of self-pity have, in point of fact, resulted in the transfer of many millions of property from brutal, blundering Saxons to tearful, poetical Celts. However that may be, the Irish Question was eminently one worthy of the best attention of a great artist, and there were few greater artists than William Makepeace Thackeray. Moreover, this great man was never weary of decrying reason and upholding the impulses of the heart as the more trustworthy guide in human affairs. Essentially sympathetic to sentimental natures, because a sentimentalist himself, Mr. Thackeray might confidently have been expected to do work which could help England to understand Ireland.

A brilliant Irishman, descended from a historic Catholic family, a member of a learned profession,

and a life-long student of men and books, once remarked to me: "Thackeray had the contempt of the Cockney for everybody who was not exactly like himself." It was his opinion that Thackeray's works had irrevocably embittered the feelings of Englishmen and Irishmen each for the other. This is but one man's conclusion, although (in point of fact) it is the conclusion of one better entitled to pronounce judgment than all but one in ten thousand; but of whom do we think when we try to call up Thackeray's Irish? Of whom indeed but The Mulligan, Captain Costigan, and Mrs. O'Dowd? If these are typical Irish, then most rightly would the Irish nation be relegated to a secondary place in the life of the Empire (a place which, in point of fact, it does not occupy). Such besotted vanity, such imbecile pretentiousness, such lack of solid qualities, deserves nothing but contempt and neglect. Here, again, as in the case of the Church and the Civil Service of India, Mr. Thackeray's types incontestably exist and existed: but so many other types existed as well.

If we resume the place of the student of history in the twenty-second century, and look back on Ireland as it appears in Mr. Thackeray's works, we shall see nothing more than a remote and fragmentary resemblance to the actual state of things. Here, too, we observe the omission of all that is distinguished and attractive. The brilliant Irishman does not exist for Mr. Thackeray, any more than the illustrious Civil Servant or the high-minded Churchman, of whom there were so many. There is no doubt about the excellence of the portraits actually provided for us. Their place is recognised; and they have passed into the catalogue of those things which are indispensable to the mental

equipment of any English-speaking person pretending to culture or even to education. The question is whether we have not, by now, discovered the boundaries of Thackeray's empire? If, in the case of three wide provinces of human life, we find that nothing appeals to this great artist except what is ludicrous or discreditable (or can be made to appear so), have we not grounds for forming a conclusion which may be tested by further observations? In effect Mr. Thackeray hated excellence. This appears to be a hard saying; but is it not more and more justified the more we study the types he has drawn and the teaching which he obviously desires us to absorb from the fate of his characters?

"Would you be great?" says one of Mr. Disraeli's characters, obviously speaking Mr. Disraeli's own mind; "Would you be great? Nurture your mind upon great thoughts." Not only is there no such noble incentive to effort discoverable in Mr. Thackeray's works, but greatness does not exist there, except that Mr. Thackeray may fling vitriol at distinction, at success, or at grandeur.

All this time we must remember that we are speaking of a consummate artist, a conspicuous social figure, a distinguished man of the world. We cannot advance the author's ignorance or inexperience or carelessness as counter-considerations when a given effect appears regrettable, or even of evil example. He knew many, if not all, social strata; he saw everything; his powers of narrative and exposition were unrivalled; yet one cannot rise from the study of his works without a sense of gasping depression. The man is so great and convincing, his atmosphere so captivating, that one reads and re-reads him fascinated, and does not

stop to examine or criticise. As Mr. Thackeray says, so must it be. There are surely very few young readers who can be proof against such an influence. Perhaps Mr. Ruskin was thinking on these lines when he denounced Mr. Thackeray's works as "poison." Schopenhauer, too, wielded an admirable prose style, and he taught pernicious nonsense with so grave a face and in so convincing a manner that he wrought inconceivable mischief. Mr. Thackeray, the apostle of mediocrity, did not in so many words enjoin middling ways of life and thought. He adopted a far more dexterous and telling plan of campaign. He carried the war into the enemy's country, pursued excellence, fastened on it, flung vitriol in its face, and trampled it under-foot. He has been widely and attentively read, and timidly criticised—as might well be expected in the case of so mighty an opponent. Mr. Disraeli (by way of contrast) loved the large, full life, whether as a living companion or as a subject for romance. The middle classes did not interest him—a singular reflection when we remember that the whole of his parliamentary career was spent in the days when no man could hope for success who did not appeal successfully to middle-class ideas and (perhaps) prejudices. The strong, successful character attracted him. He loved to portray men who followed full and vigorous and varied careers. Mr. Thackeray hardly ever draws a successful character without bespattering it with abuse or derision.

Let us take this description. It is not from either Thackeray or Disraeli: it is by the late Sir James Paget. It is not concerned with greatness as typified by rank or the marks of a sovereign's favour, or by success in the fighting services. It is but the sketch of a prosperous city merchant:—

"He was a truly admirable man; an example of that admirable class, the rich merchants given to good works; men who make money with great care, and give it away with as great liberality; men who are exact and orderly in business; sometimes even exacting when those they deal with are not needy; winning money as keenly as others would win games at cards; counting their money as the fairest estimate of their success in a difficult and honest competition; but, once counted, giving it freely, and with it giving their time and strong will and knowledge to the management of great charities. Mr. Bentley was the best among them; rich and still making money as if he wanted it for himself; generous, pious, rigid, requiring every one's whole duty to be done, resolute for everything that he thought right."

No man can read this without thinking the better of commerce as the occupation of a life. When a genius of the inflexible probity and calm sagacity of Sir James Paget can write thus of business, there is no man who is worth his salt who would not wish to go into that fray, take the rough with the smooth, succeed, and glory in his success. This it is to dignify life.

For a young man the estimate is, perhaps, too calm and measured to be altogether attractive. There is, perhaps, over-much insistence on piety and altruism,—qualities which are, as a rule, abhorrent to healthy young men—and there is, perhaps, a lack of all mention of dash and adventure, without which life looks less attractive to a young man entering upon his career. Mr. Disraeli supplies the want in his portrait of Mr. Milbanke, the cotton-spinner, whose career might have been in Sir James's mind when he recorded the good life of Mr. Bentley. In addition to being a

prosperous manufacturer, Mr. Milbanke was a keen politician, rejoicing in the growing importance of commerce, and proud of his own position in the throng of the rich. "My father has often told me that in his early days the displeasure of a peer of England was like a sentence of death to a man. . . . I defy any peer to crush me, though there is one who would be very glad to do it." In this fighting temper Mr. Milbanke achieves, and rejoices in, success: rejoices in it none the less that it enables him to avenge a wrong put upon him in his youth. Yet is he generous withal, and readily forgiving, even beyond the point which most men would esteem the limit of endurance. Even more pointedly, in the higher and gayer temper of Lord Hainault, Mr. Disraeli contrives to let us know that success is creditable; that success is compatible with goodness: may be borne without arrogance, and even with grace; that success is the legitimate objective of a full and vigorous nature. On the other hand, there is no man worth his salt who would not rather be poor than rich if the condition of being rich was to resemble Mr. George Osborne, senior. Barnes Newcome, with his ready arrogance for the weak and his ready subservience to the strong, presents a disgusting picture of the arts by which wealth may be acquired. And Mr. Thackeray furnishes no portraits of wealthy men except those which tell on their face, how discreditable is the process of acquiring riches.

Thus we see that even the humble capacity which goes to turning a shilling into half-a-crown must not be possessed in a marked degree, or employed successfully. Pursuing our examination of the nineteenth century from the point of view of the twenty-second,

let us now see what the "Lords of the Council and all the nobility" achieved, and whether or no, according to Mr. Thackeray, or in fact, they were endued with "grace, wisdom, and understanding."

"De l'Angleterre tout est grand," wrote Victor Hugo, "même l'oligarchie." Somewhat inconsistently he added (writing after the second Reform Bill) "l'aristocratie agonise." Hardly, though it may well have been so imagined by any one who did not take note of the command it still retained over the fighting services, and its systematic annexation of the wealth acquired in commerce. It marked the middle classes for its enemy, and 1885 avenged 1832. Writing of the contrasted peerages of England and France in the seventeenth century, M. Hugo produced a passage new thirty years ago, classical to-day:—

"Les pairs de France étaient plus hauts et moins puissants, tenant au rang plus qu'à l'autorité, et à la préséance plus qu'à la domination. Il y avait entre eux et les lords la nuance qui sépare la vanité de l'orgueil. Pour les pairs de France, avoir le pas sur les princes étrangers, précéder les grands d'Espagne, primer les patrices de Venise, faire asseoir sur les bas sièges du parlement les maréchaux de France, le connétable et l'amiral de France, fût-il comte de Toulouse et fils de Louis XIV., distinguer entre les duchés mâles et les duchés femelles, maintenir l'intervalle entre une comté simple comme Armagnac ou Albret et une comté-pairie comme Evreux, porter de droit, dans certains cas, le cordon bleu ou la toison d'or à vingt-cinq ans, contre-balancer le duc de la Trémoille, le plus ancien pair chez le roi, par le duc d'Uzès, le plus ancien pair en parlement, prétendre à autant de pages et de chevaux au carrosse qu'un électeur, se faire dire

monseigneur par le premier président, discuter si le duc de Maine a rang de pair, comme comte d'Eu, dès 1458, traverser la grande chambre diagonalement ou par les côtés ; c'était la grosse affaire."

Such, according to M. Hugo, was the mighty peerage of France, extinct to-day, precisely because it considered that these things really mattered and were essential to its existence. Now, what does M. Hugo say of the British peerage ?

"La grosse affaire pour les lords, c'était l'acte de navigation, le test, l'enrôlement de l'Europe au service de l'Angleterre, la domination des mers, l'expulsion des Stuarts, la guerre à la France. Ici, avant tout l'étiquette ; là, avant tout l'empire. Les pairs d'Angleterre avaient la proie, les pairs de France avaient l'ombre."

The same qualities which gave to the nobility of England the control of the State in the seventeenth century restored to their successors the control of the State in the nineteenth century. It is not necessary to state the case extravagantly. No very high intelligence was brought to bear on the problem—no very high intelligence was necessary. No very lofty qualities were displayed, for nothing very lofty was aimed at ; but courage, energy, persistence in the pursuit of one object—the recovery of power : these were needed. Further, by the punctual discharge of daily duty and the use of considerable subtlety in recommending themselves to the electorate—by these and humbler arts, the nobility of England have effected the transfer to themselves of all—and more than all—of the authority wielded by their grandfathers.

It is clear that the peerage of England was a serious and even a formidable institution ; what Mr. Thackeray

thought of it we shall see. Meanwhile it may be useful to remember his famous sketch of Louis le Roi, in three pencil drawings. The first represents the Great Monarch in all his magnificence; the second represents the man without wig or shoes, and is entitled "Louis"; the third represents the wig and high-heeled shoes alone, and is entitled "Le Roi." This is very funny, certainly, and clearly (for Mr. Thackeray) royalty was merely an affair of clothes. It was not, altogether, for M. Victor Hugo. And when we remember what Bacon mildly and suavely wrote—"Clothes do not make a gentleman, but we cannot think of a gentleman without clothes"—have we not, in considering Mr. Thackeray's "Louis le Roi," something of the sensation we should experience if we saw a mountebank side by side with an orator?

Just as in the sixteenth century we have the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, just as in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries we have the Revolution and the anti-Napoleonic Revolution, so throughout the whole course of the nineteenth century we have the Reform movement—which tore power from the aristocracy—and what (for the sake of a name) may be called the Counter-Reform movement, which restored it to them at the expense of the middle classes.

The spirit of the Counter-Reform movement is all given in *Coningsby*. Lord Monmouth is addressing his grandson:—

"These are not times when young men should be out of sight. Your public career will commence immediately. The Government have resolved on a dissolution. My information is from the highest quarter. You may be astonished, but it is a fact.

They are going to dissolve their own House of Commons. Notwithstanding this, and the Queen's name, we can beat them; but the race requires the finest jockeying. We can't give a point. Tadpole has been here to me about Dartford; he came specially with a message, I may say an appeal, from one to whom I can refuse nothing; the Government count on the seat, though with the new Registration 'tis nearly a tie. If we had a good candidate we could win. But Rigby won't do. He is too much of the old clique; used up, a hack, besides a beaten horse. We are assured the name of Coningsby would be a host; there is a considerable section who support the present fellow who will not vote against a Coningsby. They have thought of you as a fit person, and I have approved of the suggestion. You will, therefore, be the candidate for Dartford with my entire sanction and support, and I have no doubt you will be successful. You may be sure I shall spare nothing: and it will be very gratifying to me, after being robbed of all our boroughs, that the only Coningsby who cares to enter Parliament should nevertheless be able to do so as early as I could fairly desire."

Much talk follows on the state of parties in England, and then Lord Monmouth concludes:—

"What is the use of lamenting the past? Peel is the only man; suited to the times and all that; at least we must say so, and try to believe so; we can't go back. And it is our own fault that we have let the chief power out of the hands of our own order. It was never thought of in the time of your great-grandfather, sir. And if a commoner were for a season permitted to do the detail, there

was always a secret committee of great 1688 nobles to give him his instructions."

Here we have the inside of things. Mr. Thackeray saw nothing but the courtyard, the liveries, the little side-door, and the supper-room. Or, rather, he chose to record nothing but these things: for he must have seen everything. The result is that if we examine the position of the nobility of England in the nineteenth century, as set forth in Mr. Thackeray's novels, we shall find that the picture has very little relation to the facts. The peerage would appear to have consisted entirely of fops and rakes. No doubt there were fops and rakes in its ranks, as there were in every other class of the community,—just so many (in proportion) and probably no more—but the fops and rakes, by judiciously employing their considerable leisure and resources, re-transferred to themselves the power of which they were deprived in 1832. This is a political movement of very great importance: a movement perfectly unintelligible if Mr. Thackeray's work is to be taken as representative. It is no more possible to imagine Kews and Dorkings and Highgates effecting a revolution than it is to imagine Binnies and Sedleys governing India, or to imagine a great nation committing its spiritual interests to Charles Honeyman and the Bishop of Bullocksmithy.

It so happens that the same man served as a model both for Mr. Thackeray and Mr. Disraeli. The Marquis of Steyne and the Marquis of Monmouth were both drawn from a well-known social figure of the early and middle nineteenth century. Nothing could be more instructive than to place the two portraits side by side. Without, however, taking so much trouble, let us compare the very short account of the

death of Lord Steyne with the even shorter account of the death of Lord Monmouth:—

"Lord Monmouth had died suddenly at his Richmond villa, which latterly he never quitted, at a little supper, with no persons near him but those who were amusing. He suddenly found he could not lift his glass to his lips, and, being extremely polite, waited a few minutes before he asked Clotilde, who was singing a sparkling drinking song, to do him that service. When, in accordance with that request, she reached him, it was too late. The ladies shrieked, being frightened: at first they were in despair, but, after reflection, they evinced some intention of plundering the house. Villebecque, who was absent at the moment, arrived in time, and everybody became orderly and broken-hearted."

Here is nothing extenuated or in malice set down. This is the portrait of a man at the age when, as Talleyrand said, one is best occupied in preparing to die. Perhaps a little supper was Lord Monmouth's notion of preparing for death. What a picture of dauntless courage, iron nerve, and imperturbable polish; of the strong nature smiling in the face of death, and bidding the King of Terrors wait while a lady finishes her song!

The same event is thus narrated by Mr. Thackeray:—

"Lord Steyne's barouche, blazing with heraldic devices, came whirling along the avenue, borne by the almost priceless horses, and bearing Madame de Belladonna, lolling on the cushions, dark, sulky, and blooming, a King Charles in her lap, a white parasol swaying over her head, and old Steyne stretched at her side with a livid face and ghastly eyes. Hate, or anger, or desire, caused them to brighten now

and then still; but ordinarily they gave no light, and seemed tired of looking out on a world of which almost all the pleasure and all the best beauty had palled upon the worn-out, wicked old man.

"Everybody knows the melancholy end of that nobleman, which befel at Naples two months after the French Revolution of 1830: when the Most Honourable George Gustavus, Marquis of Steyne, Earl of Gaunt and of Gaunt Castle, in the Peerage of Ireland, Viscount Hellborough, Baron Pitchley and Grillsby, a Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, of the Golden Fleece of Spain, of the Russian Order of Saint Nicholas of the First Class, of the Turkish Order of the Crescent, First Lord of the Powder Closet and Groom of the Back Stairs, Colonel of the Gaunt or Regent's Own Regiment of Militia, a Trustee of the British Museum, an Elder Brother of the Trinity House, a Governor of the White Friars, and D.C.L.—died, after a series of fits, brought on, as the papers said, by the shock occasioned to his lordship's sensibilities by the downfall of the ancient French monarchy."

The extra scenery and machinery employed by Mr. Thackeray tell us nothing more than Mr. Thackeray's private opinion of Lord Steyne's future life. Why all this brutal invective? Disorderly behaviour in a man of mediocre rank would have hardly attracted Mr. Thackeray's attention. It is not because Lord Steyne was wicked, but because he was a marquis, that Mr. Thackeray denounced him. Exalted rank, like high character and lofty aims and noble achievements, must all be attacked and denounced, and until life is reduced to a desert of colourless drudges Mr. Thackeray will continue to disapprove. Even so, as

Mr. Trollope observed, Mr. Thackeray worked himself into such a state of mind that a man could not mount his horse or put on his gloves or order his dinner without being called a snob. Even in so small a matter as dress Mr. Thackeray must needs have his fling at what is excellent. The stately traditions of the English Court exact that no man shall make his bow to his sovereign save in becoming costume. Mr. Thackeray must needs denounce the velvet and steel of the ordinary civilian as "astounding." Why "astounding"? It is nothing like so "astounding" as the costume which Mr. Thackeray himself put on every morning of his life. It is comfortable and convenient, and (if beauty be any object in life) it is beautiful. There is no reason for sneering at it except that it is donned by royal command.

"J'ai souvent remarqué dans le monde," wrote M. Octave Feuillet, "cette influence étrange qu'exerce par sa seule présence l'homme vraiment distingué . . . on se sent vivre davantage." Precisely: "life is more intense" in the presence of great spirits. Mr. Thackeray introduces us to one great spirit—the Duke of Wellington. "'How do, Pendennis? Fine day,' were his Grace's remarkable words." They are not remarkable words, and the incident is only introduced for the purpose of jeering at Major Pendennis. The jeer seems to fall rather flat. Major Pendennis is much uplifted by being publicly recognised and addressed by the Duke of Wellington. And this is to his credit. There is no reason why Metternichs and Talleyrands and Palmerstons should be uplifted because the Duke of Wellington spoke to them; but that a man of small parts and humble rank should so have borne himself while he served the

King that a great soldier should know and remember him, is a legitimate source of pride for a man of small parts and humble rank. It is not a very important incident from any point of view, but so far as it goes Mr. Thackeray would have us understand that it is to Major Pendennis's discredit to recognise greatness.

The name of the Duke of Wellington reminds us of the considerable number of soldiers introduced to Mr. Thackeray's readers, and of the sorry figure they cut. Let any student hold a *levée*, so to speak, in his own mind of the Ralph Spurriers, the Michael O'Dowds, and the George Tuftos and their likes, and then ask himself: "Does this collection of boobies and fops and gluttons really represent the famous British army?" Of course it does not; it merely represents what is ludicrous and discreditable in the ways of the British Army. There was much that was both; but there was more that was neither the one nor the other. The exception usually quoted is Colonel Newcome. In this case Mr. Thackeray has himself produced an excellent type. He has created an immortal character, and endowed him with all manly virtues. Furious at the sight of excellence, even when it is his own handiwork, he must needs bespatter it with ridicule—make his creation a goose when he marries and a perfect idiot in business.

Not to labour the point to excess, let us take one more calling—that of diplomacy—and then make an end. Her Majesty's Envoy at the Grand Ducal Court of Pumpernickel was Lord Tapeworm, of whom one of the attachés remarked: "Look at that infernal sly-boots of a Tapeworm; wherever there is a pretty woman he always twists himself in." Very disrespectful! Now comes the author's comment: "And

I wonder what were diplomatists made for but for that?" For a great many other things, as Mr. Thackeray very well knew. For did he not live in the days of Stratford de Redcliffe, "who was the voice of England in the East?" But here, as everywhere, Mr. Thackeray tells the damaging half-truth. It is true that social duties occupy a great deal of a diplomatist's day. Rightly. A man may make a considerable income at the Bar and be quite unknown to society. He may travel up every morning by the 8.57 and return by the 6.50 for twenty years, and will prosper in his calling all the more for not knowing his way to Grosvenor Square; but a diplomatist cannot do that. If a man, and especially a young man, cannot contrive to make himself agreeable to important people (women mostly, as they constitute the larger and by far the more important part of Society), he is in the wrong trade as a diplomatist, and will probably end his career as First Secretary at Bahia Blanca.

If, then, we find that in all great walks of life—in the Church, in war, in commerce, and in diplomacy—Mr. Thackeray has nothing but abuse and sneers for success; if we find that he loves to portray the ludicrous and the discreditable only, is it unfair to say that he is the Apostle of Mediocrity? Mediocre ways of life, mediocre thoughts, mediocre inclinations (miscalled passions), mediocre achievements—these, if not positively enjoined, as they sometimes are, are in effect all that is left to one who takes Mr. Thackeray for his guide. For the rest, never had a mean gospel so doughty an Apostle.

CHARLES DICKENS

LET it be granted of any given writer that his prose style is as bad as possible. Let it be granted that his sentimental passages are nauseating; that he did not understand women, that his would-be fine writing is absurd, and that his melodrama too often makes us yawn. There would not be much left of the reputation of an ordinary writer after postulates as numerous and as damaging as these had been granted.

Nevertheless, we may say all this of Charles Dickens and yet leave his reputation unharmed. Clearly, if lovers of Charles Dickens can afford to allow their idol to be stripped of all that makes the fame of smaller men, Charles Dickens is greater than most.

Lovers of Dickens the world over find in their worship a veritable freemasonry of mirth. Care drops from our shoulders and anxiety from our brows when we remind each other that Mrs. Nickleby decided to call Smike "Mrs. Slammons." In moments of depression, and even of misery, life becomes less wearisome when we murmur: "The Baron Sampsono Brasso and his fair sister are (you tell me) at the Play? Ha! 'tis well, Marchioness! but no matter. Some wine there, ho!" Delightedly we cap passages; and while listening with joy to some reminiscence of the Fat Boy, we await the moment when we can slip in, "If the law says that, the law is a ass."

To say that Dickens is popular is a good deal less than complimentary. Rather we should define his position as that of a man whose words are household words, and whose creations are part of the English language, and no inconsiderable part of the mental inheritance of the race. Probably, at the present moment, he is not a popular writer, and that much is to his credit. If, however, we look abroad and seek for the writer whom readers of other nations appreciate as typically English, it is always Dickens whose name is to the fore. Gratifying though this may be as a tribute to the man's greatness, it is also, perhaps, a little mortifying when we learn on what grounds the world has decided to regard Charles Dickens as the typical English prose-writer: mortifying, perhaps, but instructive.

Let us consider. In the early days of the *Daily Graphic* that enterprising journal published an illustration of its own correspondent interviewing M. Jules Claretie on the question of a possible British Academy. The *Daily Graphic* emissary, in the correct overcoat of the period (a kind of revived and modified Inverness cape) is standing in front of a table behind which M. Jules Claretie, also standing, is dealing with the different literary methods of England and France. He cites Dickens and inquires, convincingly: "Pouvez-vous imaginer Dickens Académicien?" Well, no, we cannot; and while we spend half a minute in wondering why so eminent an authority as M. Jules Claretie should have overlooked the long roll of Englishmen whose presence would have adorned and illuminated the Academy of France in its most illustrious moments, we yet rejoice that at least one Englishman should have overcome the insularity of the Continent and

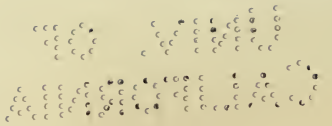
found his way to the hearts of Frenchmen. Instinctively we say "to the hearts of Frenchmen": he leaves their intelligence untouched, as indeed is not wonderful.

It is hardly necessary to dwell on the admiration of Charles Dickens cherished by citizens of the United States. We all remember what Bret Harte rhymed of the rough man of the West who loved to hear what the master wrote of Little Nell; and although we must needs admit that the weakest part of Dickens' work was that which most readily found its way to the hearts of Western miners, yet, nevertheless, there is the patent fact that there is something in the work of Dickens which is not to be disregarded.

Yet one more reminder of the wide borders of Dickens' empire, and then let us find our way, if we can, to the heart of his mystery. We have been often reminded that Gaboriau was the favourite reading of the late Prince Bismarck. More recently we have learnt that Moltke solaced the leisure of his declining years with passages from Dickens; it must be admitted that the taste of the great soldier was at least as sound as that of the Iron Chancellor.

What quality, then, in Charles Dickens—in whom his most ardent admirers admitted faults, many and grave—commended our Englishman to men so diverse? Surely it was his abounding love of his kind. If the inspiration of Thackeray was mockery, the inspiration of Dickens was love. To say that is not to say the last word. When the late Mr. Matthew Arnold somewhat condescendingly remarked that to France much must be pardoned because she loved much, the late Sir James Stephen commented that it was precisely France's way of loving mankind that most irritated

CHARLES DICKENS
(From a drawing by Samuel Lawrence)



him. He did not use the expression that I am about to employ; but his comments clearly pointed to the conclusion that, if love is a great and admirable fact, there is a certain parody of love called gush, which is neither great nor admirable.

Here we have, perhaps, the strength and weakness of Charles Dickens explained. His love of mankind, tremendous driving force as it was, invested his creations with a vitality unparalleled in fiction; it also drove him into writing passages that make us feel positively ill.

For example, towards the close of *Dombey and Son* it is Florence Dombey who speaks: she is about to address Walter Gay.

"She sat looking at him for a moment, then timidly put her trembling hand in his.

"'If you will take me for your wife, Walter, I will love you dearly. If you will let me go with you, Walter, I will go to the world's end without fear. I can give up nothing for you—I have nothing to resign, and no one to forsake; but all my love and life shall be devoted to you, and with my last breath I will breathe your name to God, if I have sense and memory left.' He caught her to his heart, and laid her cheek against his own, and now, no more repulsed, no more forlorn, she wept indeed upon the breast of her dear lover.

"Blessed Sunday bells, ringing so tranquilly in their entranced and happy ears! Blessed Sunday peace and quiet, harmonising with the calmness in their souls, and making holy air around them! Blessed twilight stealing on, and shading her so soothingly and gravely as she falls asleep, like a hushed child, upon the bosom she has clung to!

"Oh! load of love and trustfulness that lies so lightly there! Ay, look down on the closed eyes, Walter, with a proudly tender gaze; for in all the wide wide world they seek but thee now — only thee!"

Words fail one to do justice to a passage like this. Fortunately another passage from the master's pen may be cited to save the situation. "'And what did Lord Nobley say to that?' 'Why! he didn't know what to say. Damme, sir, if he wasn't as mute as a poker!'"

A certain proportion of this revolting gush could not be avoided in the years through which Dickens laboured. It is to be found in full blast in the ballad *She Wore a Wreath of Roses*, and still more in the concluding blare of *The Three Fishers*. Even so fastidious an artist as Tennyson could not altogether keep clear of it: "The stentorian martyr of Locksley Hall" is a woeful person. The "nice" women of Thackeray are made impossibly slow by reason of the overpowering sentimentality which he deemed inseparable from virtue, and once or twice he came perilously near to drivelling. When he writes, "Ho, Betty! my gruel and my slippers! And go, ye frisky merry little souls! and dance, and have your merry little supper of cake and ale!" or again, "God bless you, honest William!—Farewell, dear Amelia, grow green again, tender little parasite, round the rugged old oak to which you cling!" we are relieved to find that these are in each case the concluding words of the chapter. Daudet, in his most sentimental moments, knew how to restrain himself. "Je me sens au cœur l'amour de Dickens pour les disgraciés et les pauvres," he wrote of him-

self, "même en un temps où je ne l'avais pas lu." It is not unfair to even him with Dickens for many reasons. Probably *Jack* is even more sentimental than *Oliver Twist*, though it is harder to read, because the story is not relieved by any such tremendous creations as Sikes and Fagin. The instinctive taste of a Frenchman saved Daudet from actually maundering in the manner of Dickens, just as the remorselessly critical attitude of Thackeray towards everybody and everything (including his own style) prevented him from doing more than treat himself occasionally to a short outburst of drivel; which, for the rest, was in the air and could hardly be avoided. Now Dickens was devoid of taste, and had none of the academic fastidiousness of Thackeray. Consequently there was nothing to check the riot of gush which he found so congenial an indulgence. Thackeray, as we know, liked everybody to be alike. "If he saw 'a celebrity' with a turn-down collar (now so general), a moustache and a beard (now worn by half the population), he set him down as an ass. He liked nothing out of the way—either in manner, dress, or style."[1] Dickens liked contrasts—in particular he liked oddities. Dickens would never have called a man an ass for dressing differently from himself. If there was anything characteristic, or funny, about a man's dress, he would note it carefully, but he was too fond of his fellow-creatures to abuse them. He loved them as much for their weaknesses, their eccentricities, their faults, perhaps, as for any other qualities. It is to his careful and affectionate study of men that we owe the memory

[1] *Recollections of Thackeray*, by his cousin, Richard Bedingfield, *Cassell's Magazine*, vol. ii. N.S. p. 113.

of Mr. Bailey's tops. Who can ever think of Montague Tigg without recalling the shabby gentility of his early days, or the costly flamboyance of his fraudulent prosperity? We cannot think of Mr. Pecksniff without his wonderful collars, or of Mrs. Gamp without her terrific bonnet, or of Mr. Pickwick without his spectacles. Dickens has a place in the world of art, all untrained though he was, and in spite of M. Claretie's denunciation of the unacademic nature of his work. His method had great successes and equally great failures. In *Dombey and Son*, for example, Walter is a failure, Florence is a failure, the Dombeys father and son are both failures, Carker is a failure, and Edith Dombey is the most striking failure of all. Why his method should fail in some directions, and secure him immortal success in others, is not so easy to say. It is not a question of his understanding men and not understanding women; for Carker and Dombey are just as great failures as Edith and Florence. Perhaps the immortal Joey B. in the same book may help us to understand.

"'Dombey,' said the Major, 'I'm glad to see you. I'm proud to see you. There are not many men in Europe to whom J. Bagstock would say that—for Josh is blunt, sir; it's his nature—but Joey B. is proud to see you, Dombey.'

"'Major,' returned Mr. Dombey, 'you are very obliging.' 'No, sir,' said the Major, 'devil a bit. That's not my character. If that had been Joe's character, Joe might have been by this time Lieutenant-General Sir Joseph Bagstock, K.C.B.,'" and so on.

Or again:

"'Dombey,' said the Major with appropriate action,

'that is the hand of Joseph Bagstock, of plain old Joey B., sir, if you like that better! That is the hand of which his Royal Highness the late Duke of York did me the honour to observe, sir, to his Royal Highness the late Duke of Kent, that it was the hand of Josh; a rough and tough and possibly an up-to-snuff old vagabond.'"

Here is a man with an oddity: the kind of man that Dickens loved and Thackeray loathed, and the consequence of Dickens' study of Major Bagstock is that millions of people who probably could not tell you in what book the Major was to be found can always remember that "Joey B., sir, was tough and devilish sly."

The extreme care with which Dickens observed odd and eccentric people found its affinity in Cruikshank's or Phiz's distorted presentments of humanity; and because these men illustrated (more or less successfully) much of Dickens' work, we have grown accustomed to bracket the three men as brother artists. Now Browne and Cruikshank were caricaturists: therefore Charles Dickens was a caricaturist. Let us consider how far that conclusion is fair. Phiz did no harm by drawing Mulberry Hawk and Frederick Verisopht, because those distinguished men about town were themselves nothing but caricatures, and the illustration exactly suited them. Also Phiz was successful with Squeers and Quilp, and people who were naturally deformed; but it is not through Phiz that we remember what Tom Pinch looked like, or Montague Tigg or Pecksniff or Sairey Gamp. It is true that the weakest part of Dickens' work found adequate interpreters in Cruikshank and Phiz; but Fred Barnard, a considerable artist, had to be enlisted for the more vital types. To a certain extent Dickens

was undoubtedly a caricaturist; but most of his work is better than caricature. He had little or no sense of beauty; and when we seek in the world of painting for some brother artist whose name may be experimentally bracketed with that of Charles Dickens, we instinctively think of the Dutchmen.

That is all very well so far as it goes, but we ought to remember the vulgarity of much of Jan Steen and Ostade and Teniers, and the grossness of which even greater men could be capable. Dickens had none of this, and while we can hardly venture to place him with Rembrandt, we must cordially admit that he was superior to all but the first-rate Dutchmen.

That helps us. If he had no sense of beauty, and no more of taste than saved him from grossness, if his idealisations are unconvincing, at least his naturalism is unrivalled. As an example of the failure of his idealisations let us recall Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed on the G.W.R.*, and then contemplate the following passage:

"Away with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, from the town, burrowing among the dwellings of men and making the streets hum, flashing out into the meadows for a moment, mining in through the damp earth, burrowing on in darkness and heavy air, bursting out again into the sunny day so bright and wide; away with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the chalk, through the mould, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly with him; like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!"

There is a great deal more of this exclamatory prose: perhaps four times as much again as the passage above cited. It is clear that Dickens himself watched the railway train—a new thing when he wrote—with the most intense delight. It is also clear that he gives us not the faintest impression of the Romance of the Railway. An enumeration of the component parts of the engine would be equally effective. Yet the runaway train at the end of the *Débâcle* shows how tremendous can be the impression conveyed by a skilful artist (and Zola could be a consummate artist when he chose) in prose, with no more interesting subject than an express train.

Dickens was very fond of passages like this, and they passed in his day for fine writing. There is the passage describing Mr. Carker's return to England after his ridiculous elopement with Mrs. Dombey, a passage in which he commences twenty-eight out of thirty-two consecutive (and unfinished) sentences with the word "Of." There is, also, the famous passage in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, describing a ship at sea, which used to be set as an example of English prose in boys' books of elocution, and which was surely as tiresome a piece of writing as one would care to encounter. In all these cases there are the elements of good writing: an intense interest in his subject and fluency of language. Art alone is lacking. Alike in sentiment and in rhapsody, "what not to say" is what Dickens never learnt. Indeed there was very little temptation to subject himself to the painful process of discipline which every writer must undergo if he would achieve success in style. The public would buy any sentence that Dickens chose to sign; why then should he not write as fast as his pen would travel? He was as great a sinner, in this

respect, as Lytton himself; only, being exclusively a man of letters, he put more soul into his work than Lytton, and much of it lives. Even in *Dombey and Son* we have Captain Cuttle, whose "Stand by!" after the lapse of fifty years is still a household word. We have "Joey B." who may or may not be a caricature, but who is so exceedingly funny that people will not let him die. These are for all the world; there remain in the second rank of the characters of *Dombey and Son* a few more whom Dickens-lovers remember fondly, though the world has forgotten them. One of these is Paul the child, who has vitality, and whose affection for his sister survived in the distressing duet, *What are the Wild Waves Saying?* We were liable to be treated to this melancholy performance in out-of-the-way drawing-rooms as recently as twenty years ago. But by now even Dickens-lovers have agreed to love Paul for his relations with people like Mrs. Pipchin; with anybody, in fact, except his tedious sister. Another is Cousin Feenix, who is overlooked when it is too confidently said that Dickens could not draw a gentleman. Cousin Feenix is amusing and well bred. He is also interesting because it is really impossible to say whether Dickens intended us to laugh at him or not. There is that touch of greatness about Dickens' treatment of his many characters; we do not see Charles Dickens for ever at their elbows pulling the wires to make his puppets move—each has its individuality.

"'Dombey,' says Cousin Feenix, 'upon my soul, I am very much shocked to see you on such a melancholy occasion. My poor aunt! She was a devilish lively woman.'

"Mr. Dombey replies: 'Very much so.'

"'And made up,' says Cousin Feenix, 'really young, you know, considering. I am sure, on the day of your marriage, I thought she was good for another twenty years. In point of fact, I said so to a man at Brooks' —little Billy Joper—you know him, no doubt, man with a glass in his eye?'

"Mr. Dombey bows a negative. 'In reference to the obsequies,' he hints, 'whether there is any suggestion——'

"'Well, upon my life,' says Cousin Feenix, stroking his chin, which he has just enough of hand below his wristband to do; 'I really don't know. There's a mausoleum down at my place, in the park, but I'm afraid it's in bad repair, and, in point of fact, in a devil of a state. But for being a little out of elbows, I should have had it put to rights; but I believe the people come and make picnic parties there inside the iron railings.'

"Mr. Dombey is clear that this won't do.

"'There's an uncommon good church in the village,' says Cousin Feenix, thoughtfully; 'pure specimen of the early Anglo-Norman style, and admirably well sketched by Lady Jane Finchbury—woman with tight stays—but they've spoilt it with whitewash, I understand, and it's a long journey.'

"'Perhaps Brighton itself?' Mr. Dombey suggests.

"'Upon my honour, Dombey, I don't think we could do better,' says Cousin Feenix. 'It's on the spot, you see, and a very cheerful place.'"

Then there are Toots, and Susan Nipper, and Dr. Blimber, and last of all Cleopatra. "Those darling bygone times, Mr. Carker," says Cleopatra, "with their delicious fortresses, and their dear old dungeons, and their delightful places of torture, and their romantic

vengeances, and their picturesque assaults and sieges, and everything that makes life truly charming! How dreadfully we have degenerated!" In fact when we recall Mrs. Skewton's "There is no What's-his-name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet," we are almost tempted to place her in the first rank of Dickens' creation among the immortals.

Oliver Twist contains six immortals, if not seven: Fagan, Bumble, Charley Bates, the Artful Dodger, Bill Sikes, and Nancy, and Oliver Twist himself. The melodrama is wandering and the sentiment dreary as ever. The book as a whole, however, is intensely interesting as showing us what a dirty dangerous city London was sixty-seven years ago. There are still a few Dickens-like bits in the nearer suburbs that Dickens-lovers visit, and compare with the scenes of *Oliver Twist;* but as a city the London of to-day is hardly recognisable as the London of 1838. Even more remarkable than the transformation of the scenery has been the transformation of the burglar. Bill Sikes is a very different person from the highly respectable Peace. He had a ruffianly expression, wore a fur cap[1] of the most compromising appearance, carried a wicked-looking bludgeon, and was accompanied by a fierce and faithful dog. The "mob," of whose presence we are conscious in the early novels of Lytton, must have been both more numerous and more ruffianly than any crowd of to-day; otherwise no able cracksman would have ventured abroad in this conspicuous garb. After Peace came Raffles; and although Peace actually existed, while Sikes and Raffles are but creations of genius, yet all three are

[1] Actually a hat in the book; but he is nowadays portrayed in a cap.

equally present in our minds as types. If the type changed (shall we say improved?) in the forty years between Sikes and Peace, how much further has the profession advanced when we recognise Raffles as the typical burglar of to-day? Mr. Hornung's hero had rooms in the Albany, played for the Zingari, dined out a great deal, and did his burgling in the most gentlemanly manner.

The remorse of Bill after the murder of Nancy furnished many startling passages to the book, and is really thrilling to read even to-day. The question whether remorse is inevitably as deep and uncontrollable as Dickens painted it has often been raised. A common opinion is that there are many undetected murderers living, and that a man who will commit murder is not likely to feel much distress when he thinks of his victim. We have perhaps to remember the low and brutal type of Sikes, and the extreme difficulty of a criminal leaving the country in those days. Few things reveal the vitality of this creation as clearly as the anxiety with which we discuss, even to-day, the probability of Sikes being haunted with Nancy's dying eyes.

Fagin is as real as Shylock. How long he will remain real is a fair question. There is one remarkable difference between the two: Fagin is a rascal through and through, whereas Shylock behaved very well while receiving disgusting insults, and is really the nearest approach to a gentleman in the play.

We may note, as significant, that of these seven six are men, and even Nancy is only remembered as the girl whom Bill Sikes murdered. Bumble is perhaps even better remembered than Sikes or Fagin. "Bumble" and "Bumbledom" stand for everything

that is pompous and petty and retrogressive, and his famous remark that "the law is a ass" is one of those phrases that we all repeat without considering their origin—they are part of our language. Again, we note the comparatively feeble vitality of Dickens' female characters; how far below Bumble is Mrs. Corney! *Oliver Twist* is remarkable for containing six or seven characters of first-rate vitality, while the rest are shadows: perhaps Noah Claypole may be allowed into the second rank. Inevitably we think of *Thérèse Raquin* and of *La Bête Humaine*. In considering the remorse of Bill Sikes and the probability of the burglar allowing his superstitions to bring him to a fearful end, we cannot but feel that the psychology of the subject is as yet hardly touched. One might begin by postulating that highly strung natures would be more likely than the brutal types to suffer. That seems reasonable; but then Bill Sikes was the lowest type of ruffian imaginable; and his remorse was hideous. Perhaps the rejoinder would be that these low types are often dominated by superstitions which do the work of disordered nerves in finer natures. Most people content themselves with saying, firmly, "Of course murderers suffer remorse;" the conclusion being hardly distinguishable from the premiss that they ought to do so. But the premiss is unsound. Observation tells us that nothing but the death-penalty restrains men from committing murder. The figures for Italy and England, which I was at pains to compare for the year 1887, tell their own tale. In Italy (where the death penalty is not inflicted) the number of murders in one year was 2805; in England and Wales, 152. The idea of murder clearly becomes less and less terrible in proportion as the crime is more

frequently committed. In England, where a murderer is hanged, there can be no opportunities of discovering whether he might not, if released, lead a prosperous and happy life. In Italy, where so many convicted murderers emerge on society after paying a penalty, not always severe, there must, therefore, be quite a considerable body of men who are in the position to affirm (as they probably do) that after all remorse is not a very terrible thing to face, and is quite worth facing at the price of removing a detested being from the face of the earth.

For the purposes of the novel, remorse in all its phases is invaluable. The concluding scene of *Thérèse Raquin* is terrific; the end of Bill Sikes hardly less so. Nevertheless there must be impressive possibilities in the character of a man who murders without remorse. R. L. Stevenson pierced to the heart of the mystery when he drew the character of Huish, and made him say to the vacillating Captain: "You want to kill people, you do; but you want to do it in kid gloves. Well, it ain't to be done that way. Murder ain't safe, it ain't easy, it ain't genteel, and it takes a man to do it." Yes; "it takes a man to do it": one with nerves of steel, and not necessarily a low type. That which De Quincey touched with inimitable grace, "Murder as a Fine Art," yet awaits the ample treatment of a great artist. John Silver is good, great even; but greater work remains to be done. Dickens could not have done it. He lacked the necessary patience; and, to do him justice, he loved to make his work teach a moral. Not that the work, when done, will not be a superb moral study; but it certainly will not be a study in the obviously didactic manner which Dickens preferred, and of which he was, perhaps, only capable.

Something very near to work of this kind was done when R. L. Stevenson produced *The Wrecker*. "Mine is a beastly story," said Carthew; "you will wonder that I can sleep." Yet he could sleep for all he was a murderer, and could lead a quiet life without taking to drink or opium. He painted, "rather well"; and consoled himself in many harmless ways. No doubt he was sorry for his crime; but he did not deem it necessary to drink himself to death, or to give himself up to justice when there was really a great deal to be said for him, although nothing that would have availed him at the Central Criminal Court. He remained capable of strong friendship, and he was a kindly if somewhat saddened companion. Hence, when we remember the abominable wretch to whose murder he was an accessory after the fact, we arrive at the startling conclusion that the world was actually the better for the presence of a murderer and the absence of his victim.

The narrative of *Oliver Twist* is of no consequence; the only interesting passages occur when groups of rascals come together to plan some villainy. There is, really, a story in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Although Dickens published it as a study in selfishness, one would never divine the fact from the way the story runs. Nor is the story any more interesting when we learn what is the moral that it is intended to enforce; but that does not matter, for it is an almost perfect story from beginning to end. There are, probably, fewer *longueurs* in *Martin Chuzzlewit* than in Dickens' other works. He succeeds even with the girl Ruth Pinch; and as for the immortals, they are many. Sairey Gamp and Betsey Prig and the imaginary Mrs. Harris are part of our language.

Who does not remember "The Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Insurance Company, Limited," with its capital of "the figure two and as many oughts after it as the printer can get into the same line"? Who can ever forget our Mark Tapley? We say instinctively "our" Mark Tapley; for he belongs to all of us with his courage, his cheerfulness, and his simplicity. Above all, who can forget Pecksniff, the Tartuffe of England, a creation as great as Molière's?

If we need evidence that the inspiration of Dickens' work was love of his kind, we cannot do better than consider his relations with the citizens of the United States. Surely no people on the face of the earth are more sensitive, more touchy even, on the point of their national honour, than citizens of the United States of North America. The more stolid Briton accepts with meekness remarks that would instantly rouse the ire of his cousin over the water. There are many explanations of this—some favourable, some unfavourable. The late Edmund J. Phelps, who knew us as well as any of his compatriots, did not find it so easy to diagnose us. At the time of the first great navy scare of our generation he remarked: "You English are the most extraordinary nation. People may say to you that you are in the most critical position, that your navy is wholly inadequate to your needs, and that your great empire may collapse any day at a touch; and you listen with all courtesy and then say, 'Yes, I know it's very bad; but I've got a luncheon engagement, and must be off now; we'll talk about that later.'" There is, in this, a touch of Drake over his game of bowls, with the Armada in the offing, and also a touch of the too boisterous Harold before the battle of Hastings.

Let any one out of his own experience recall the two or three occasions on which he may have ventured remarks of one-tenth of this pungency to a citizen of the United States: was the citizen content to listen? or did he not deem it a point of honour to put us in our place on the spot; by way of vindicating the honour of his country? "We are the intellect and virtue of the airth, the cream of human natur', and the flower of moral force. Our backs is easy ris. We must be cracked up, or they rise, and we snarls. We shows our teeth, I tell you, fierce. You'd better crack us up, you had,"—so says Mr. Hannibal Chollop. Mr. Chollop, Mr. Scadder, Elijah Pogram—in how many more characters did not Dickens fearlessly lash the conceit and ignorance of the citizens of the great Republic as he knew them? And yet they loved him. They forgave him all; they worshipped his genius, and endured from him more than they would have endured from any other critic in the world. How can we explain this except upon the hypothesis that the sheer lovableness of the man overcame all resentment and all acrimony?

In the United States, as in England, it was the lowly, or the moderately well-placed people who attracted his attention. The great Southern aristocracy might not have existed, so far as Dickens was concerned. When it is lightly said that Dickens could not draw a gentleman—or at least did not draw gentlemen—it is true that what the French used to call "le hig-lif" was a closed book to him. He had an eye for the essential qualities of a gentleman, but it would almost appear that he had a mission to prove that these qualities were exclusively, or at least more frequently, found among the lowly than among those

who are conventionally termed "gentlemen." Sir Leicester Dedlock is hardly less of a caricature than Sir Mulberry Hawk, and hardly less of a shadow than the Coodles and Doodles of the imaginary Cabinet. That does not mean that these people are not very amusing studies, but it would appear that Dickens intended them to be more than that, for in the fuller study of Eugène Wrayburn, who may fairly be claimed as one of Dickens' "gentlemen," we find that his career ends happily and satisfactorily by marriage with Lizzie Hexham. Now Eugène Wrayburn was a barrister of good family, and Lizzie was a girl literally out of the gutter. We are clearly to understand that these artificial distinctions are of no consequence, and that the essential lady and gentleman can mock at them. This is so lamentably the contrary of human experience, that nothing but misery can await the Wrayburns in their married life; each would be for ever torturing the other, and Wrayburn would be socially ruined. As a social teacher (and many people took him seriously as one) Dickens could have done nothing but harm. That pernicious line, "A man's a man for a' that," which has debauched the minds of three generations of Britons, may be said to have been the unwritten text on which, when he decided to sermonise, he preached eloquently. Dickens was not at his best in the pulpit, and his text calls for more casuistry than he commanded if anything is to be made of it. In the sense in which "A man's a man for a' that" is true, it is not important; in so far as it aspires to be important, it is horribly misleading. "A tree's a tree for a' that" is an equally sound position; yet if the fleets of England had been built of timber selected upon democratic

principles, our admirals would have had some wonderful adventures.

Dickens himself was ready enough to mock (and quite rightly) at the besotted habit of regarding important work merely as so much opportunity for providing employment for incapable people who happen to be "in the swim." "Then there is my Lord Boodle, of considerable reputation with his party, who has known what office is, and who tells Sir Leicester Dedlock with much gravity, after dinner, that he really does not see to what the present age is tending. A debate is not what a debate used to be; the House is not what the House used to be; even the Cabinet is not what it formerly was. He perceives with astonishment that, supposing the present Government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown in the formation of a new Ministry would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle, supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle, which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the Leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you going to do with Noodle? You can't offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can't put him in the Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock) because you can't provide for Noodle!

"On the other hand, the Right Honourable William

Buffy, M.P., contends across the table with some one else, that the shipwreck of the country—about which there is no doubt; it is only the manner of it that is in question—is attributable to Cuffy. If you had done with Cuffy what you ought to have done when he first came into Parliament, and had prevented him from going over to Duffy, you would have got him into an alliance with Fuffy, you would have had with you the weight attaching as a smart debater to Guffy, you would have brought to bear upon the elections the wealth of Huffy, you would have got in for three counties Juffy, Kuffy, and Luffy, and you would have strengthened your administration by the official knowledge and the business habits of Muffy. All this, instead of being as you now are, depending on the caprice of Puffy."

This is very funny, and probably hardly an exaggeration, and might, perhaps, apply to other days than the days of Sir Leicester Dedlock. It is in *Bleak House* that we find the famous Chancery case of Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce, which ended by the whole estate disappearing in costs. It is in *Bleak House* that we encounter Chadband, the twin-brother of Stiggins of *Pickwick*. In close connection with Sir Leicester Dedlock, and investigating the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn, is the incomparable Bucket. Probably, however, the memory of Bucket, the burly and well-fed detective, has been destroyed by the intenser and nearer presence of the lean gentleman, the ascetic and scientific Mr. Holmes. In *Bleak House* we find a very tiresome personage, Mr. Laurence Boythorn, whose noisy manners have had so unfortunate an influence on only too many imitators. Mr. Laurence Boythorn was supposed to be a portrait of Walter

Savage Landor, just as Mr. Harold Skimpole was supposed to be a portrait of Leigh Hunt. In *Bleak House* we are much concerned with Poor Jo, who was alway "a movin' on." Jo and Little Em'ly (in *David Copperfield*) are perhaps the most vital of Dickens' sentimental and pathetic creations.

It was intelligible that Dickens should take up the case against the ruinous and heartbreaking delays of the Court of Chancery, and his work was most skilfully done. Whether or no he produced any effect is hard to say. What is not so easily intelligible is his famous case of "spontaneous combustion." What could it have mattered to Dickens (one reflects) whether spontaneous combustion was a possible phenomenon or not? Perhaps some contemporary controversy (now forgotten) gave him the cue. However that may be, he made quite a point of upholding the possibility of a death which most medical men agree in wholly disbelieving.

"The Lord Chancellor of the Court, true to his title in the last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors of all courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally — inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only—Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died."

As in everything else that he undertook, he "took up" spontaneous combustion with an energy and a plenitude of conviction that is, in itself, refreshing in our more languid days. The detail is truly Zolaesque,

and the catastrophe tragically loathsome; it transcends in horror even the galvanised corpse of Edgar Poe's tale. What with spontaneous combustion and Chancery procedure, one would suppose that Dickens had found enough to occupy his attention through the course of one novel; but, in addition, there is the case of Tom All Alone's: the denunciation of rotting tenements and overcrowded cemeteries. Both of these reforms profited, in all probability, by his championship. Not that Mr. Dickens would have been quoted as a sanitary expert or a great authority on municipal organisation, so much as that his large public—composed of the solid voting middle-class (negligible to-day, all-powerful sixty years ago)—adopted his ideas. For them, when Dickens spoke, it was as though a prophet spoke. He did not exactly dogmatise, but the persuasiveness of his humanity, his energy, and his boundless popularity, produced much the same effect as (and perhaps a greater effect than) the "Thus saith the Lord" of the great Hebrew reformers.

Unlike *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House* contains but one immortal—Chadband—and a number of characters in the second flight whom Dickens-lovers remember with delight, but who have, in all probability, passed away from the memory of the present generation, if indeed the present generation reads *Bleak House*. Whether it reads *Bleak House* or not, it cannot help knowing the name of Chadband. It is not only in the case of types of character that the work of Dickens has attained what for the present we must call "immortality." There are institutions and phrases that we cite while ignoring, very often, their origin. The "Don't presume to dictate" of Mr. Alfred Jingle, and

the use of words "in a Pickwickian sense," are examples of phrases that have passed into the language. "The Circumlocution Office" is an example of an institution that we all know. How vivid are the types: the flippant, the pompous, the merely insolent, and all, all incompetent!

Take the pompous type. "May I inquire," says the unhappy victim, "how I can obtain official information as to the real state of the case?"

"It is competent," said Mr. Barnacle, "to any member of the—Public," mentioning that obscure body with reluctance as his natural enemy, "to memorialise the Circumlocution Department. Such formalities as are required to be observed in so doing, may be known on application to the proper branch of that Department."

"Which is the proper branch?"

"I must refer you," said Mr. Barnacle, ringing the bell, "to the Department itself for a formal answer to that inquiry."

The miserable Clennam returns to the Department and encounters Tite Barnacle junior: "I want to know," he begins.

"Look here! Upon my soul, you musn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know," remonstrated Barnacle junior.

"I want to know," said Arthur Clennam, . . . "the precise nature of the claim of the Crown against a prisoner for debt named Dorrit."

"I say, look here! You really are going it at a great pace, you know. Egad, you haven't got an appointment," said Barnacle junior, as if the thing were growing serious.

After other agreeable experiences, of "how not

to do it"—the art of the Department—the applicant arrives at a Barnacle, "on the more sprightly side of the family, who says: "Oh! you had better not bother yourself about it, I think"! but on being pressed, indicates the not very hopeful form of procedure to be adopted by the Public. "Arthur Clennam looked very doubtful indeed. 'But I am obliged to you at any rate,' said he, 'for your politeness.' 'Not at all,' replied this engaging young Barnacle. 'Try the thing, and see how you like it. It will be in your power to give it up at any time, if you don't like it. You had better take a lot of forms away with you. Give him a lot of forms!'"

Little Dorrit has contributed less to the language than most of Dickens' novels. The "Circumlocution Office" stands; and many people still quote "There's milestones on the Dover Road," that very funny ejaculation of "Mr. F.'s Aunt"; but the rest of the book is probably forgotten.

As a rule the dialogue in Dickens' novels is not very remarkable. There is one exception, constantly overlooked, in *Barnaby Rudge*. This novel, if remembered at all, is perhaps remembered as the book in which the Lord George Gordon riots are introduced. This part of the work is well done: as well depicted with pen and ink as Loutherbourg might have depicted it on canvas. Dolly Varden has vitality; and numerous agreeable fashions have been named after her. In the second flight comes Sim Tappertit, and Dickens-lovers cherish endless choice memories of the "Maypole" and the raven. But all alike overlook the really masterly portrait of Sir John Chester. This is the more striking because of the contrasted portrait of Haredale in the same book. In these two men

Dickens has exemplified the principles that receive his approbation. Haredale, we are constantly told, is honest, though poor; with rough and forbidding manners, but kind-hearted. He dresses badly. Sir John Chester is elegantly built, carefully dressed, impeccable as to his exterior; but we are given to understand that he is a whited sepulchre. All this is in line with Dickens' ideals—the ideal of essential honesty, with carelessness as to appearances; in short, that "a man's a man for a' that."

To elaborate the figure of Sir John Chester must have cost Charles Dickens a great deal of trouble, and the result is probably not by any means that which he anticipated. For Chester stands out brilliant and charming, while the portrait of Haredale, hardly distinct, is unimpressive. We have a confused impression of violent language and brutal gestures, and we have the author's assurance that Haredale is a very respectable man; but that is all. In the dialogues between Chester and his two sons, Hugh and Edward, between Chester and Sim Tappertit, in short, in every scene where he appears, Chester is the striking figure, the dominant figure, the attractive figure. He is made to do a number of shady things, such as intercepting letters; but the amazing result of Mr. Dickens' work is that, far from reprobating these lapses, we gladly forget them for the sake of being in such agreeable company, and even take pleasure in the acquaintanceship of such a polished person by way of contrast with the clumsy savages who surround him. If honesty and essential worth can be so extremely silly and boorish as the virtuous characters of *Barnaby Rudge*, well, we shrink from the conclusion, but we cannot help shrugging our shoulders.

The best judges have agreed that the two most vivid works of Charles Dickens are the *Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield*. *Pickwick* was published seventy years ago, and is not only read with delight to-day, but has furnished countless figures and phrases which are part of our language. The whole of the Pickwick Club, all the characters in the trial of Bardell *v.* Pickwick, Mrs. Leo Hunter, Count Smorltork, Mr. Stiggins, the Wellers—father and son, Bob Sawyer and Benjamin Allen, and The Fat Boy: there are few people who do not know all these people better than they know their living neighbours. Nevertheless the world to which they belonged has wholly passed away. This makes their survival the more striking; and is evidence, surely, of Dickens' passion of love for his kind. Nothing else and nothing less could have breathed vitality into such a collection of oddities.

David Copperfield is generally accepted as the autobiography of Charles Dickens. The "immortals" are Uriah Heep, Mr. Micawber, and Mr. Brooks of Sheffield. Betsy Trotwood is successful; but, as is nearly always the case, the sentimental part of the book is not only heavily touched but unconvincing. Dickens-lovers enjoy the atmosphere of *David Copperfield* intensely. We love to set each other questions in examination form, such as "amid pillows for how many did David fall asleep in the Golden Cross Hotel?" Our affection for the book is the answering echo of the love which inspired it. We dwell in the Dickens scenery and amid Dickens characters and Dickens memories, not critically, as we might in recalling the work of more academic people, but in scenes where we are at home and may take our ease, sure of our

welcome. Rightly did M. Claretie refuse Mr. Dickens academic rank; but though that was fair and true, it is hardly final. There have been many Academicians, but there is only one Charles Dickens, and when will there be another.

We may say of his work, as a whole, what Tourguéneff said of *Le Nabab*, that it may be described as being in some parts very great, while much of it is hackwork. If there is something in Dickens that we would prefer to forget, there is at least as much that we cannot forget if we would. He is often a caricaturist, but at least as often he is far above all caricaturists. His place is not with the greatest artists. He does not live with the Veroneses and the Titians, but he is far apart from the Caraccisti. He is hardly Rembrandt, but we cannot leave him with the Jan Steens and the Ostades. He is not academic, he remained to the last untrained, undrilled, recognising no models, consciously or unconsciously, —one would even say that he despised them. As a result he often created, and he often drivelled. He cheers us beyond any other writer that ever lived; and he bores us worse than the daily newspaper. He stands alone: Charles Dickens.

LORD LYTTON

THE nineteenth century was essentially the Age of Faith: people would believe in anything. At the beginning of the century a new religion was founded upon the basis of polygamy, with a gospel demonstrably of human origin. It prospered greatly, and has only been stamped out by the pressure of that tyrannical public opinion which is rapidly moulding the mind of the States on lines which, for dull uniformity, can only be paralleled in Russia. Even that opinion has not yet succeeded in stamping out the other new religion, more prosperous even than Mormonism, which was founded at the end of the century, which includes in its ritual a parody of the Lord's Prayer, and which is based upon the blank denial of obvious facts.

These are two comparatively sane manifestations of the strangest phenomenon of the century. There are many others. People who denied the Apostolical succession were quite prepared to maintain the apostleship of Edward Irving. Even the gods of ancient Egypt lived again; and men and women to whom Christianity was an idle dream bowed awestruck at the name of Isis. The miracles of the Gospels were challenged and championed in turn by giants of controversy; but while the giants wrestled in the classic arena, thousands of lesser mortals were stirred in

their obscurity by miracles involving tricks with tea-cups and cigarettes. Jeremiah was rejected as a prophet; but Kut Humi took his place. Nor are we to suppose that this was mere idle speculation. Action followed on conversion, and men and women who spurned the idea of a Lenten fast as something superstitious and even shocking, were quite ready to hound themselves into mental and physical anæmia at the command of Mages who dwelt beyond the Himalayas or the Rockies. How far it is true that Devil-worship revived is uncertain. The reports of sects of "Diabolistes" (the orthodox), with their Protestant rivals the "Satanistes" (or *vice versâ*), may have been exaggerated, but it is certain that men satisfied their hungry faith by worshipping each other. In their "Temples of Humanity" they preached a quaint if intelligible pessimism, which found outward expression in a kind of mundane Nirvana, where dinner came regularly.

In the track of this gruesome array there trooped a crowd of camp-followers — fortune-tellers, table-turners, spiritualists. Witches throve again; not the awesome hags of Saul and Shakespeare, but well-dressed people who dealt in daylight for guineas. The gentler impulses of our nature were pressed into the service of these fallen angels. The revolt which all noble minds must feel at the gross abuse of alcohol, the tenderness for animal life which is one of the most attractive traits of the English character, were both enlisted and dragged at the chariot-wheels of less respectable impulses.

In all this Lord Lytton saw his chance. At first for pleasure, and later for curiosity, and at last for business reasons, he saturated his mind with the

LORD LYTTON

(From a portrait by E. Gustav Girardot, reproduced by permission of The Dowager Countess of Lytton)
Photographed specially for "The Bookman"

lore of magic. Its vocabulary was familiar to him; and among crystal globes and steel divining-rods and elixirs of life he moved as a professor in his laboratory. There is another reason why Lytton's supernatural writings remain, while so much else that was highly considered at the time has been forgotten. In the first Lord Lytton there were two men: one the man of business, clear-headed, industrious, a man among men; the other, the being gifted (or cursed) with a riotous imagination. His pen was equally at the service of either of these interesting characters. When he was in the world he was of the world. As Cabinet Minister, playwright, sportsman, or man of fashion he took high rank. One would naturally infer that a mind nourished on such various food would produce remarkable work when it turned to fiction. On the contrary, when the study-doors were closed and the pen was taken up, imagination—so long repressed while its master dealt with leases, and treaties, and copyrights, and points of honour—was no longer kept in wholesome check. Where works of imagination were written, when the subject answered to the exaltation of Lytton's character, results permanent, because the offspring of natural effort, were obtained. *The Haunters and the Haunted* is the most terrifying ghost story ever written, not even excepting *The Mark of the Beast* and *At the End of the Passage*. Not only is it the best story, but it is the best piece of narrative prose that Lytton ever signed. In almost all his other works we feel the conflict between what Lytton would fain have written, and what he was condemned to write by the exigencies of his situation. For here we come to the secret of the considerable output of

Lytton's genius, as well as to the explanation of his atrocious style. He wanted money badly; he wrote for money, careless of what he signed so long as it sold. When his imagination was too long kept in hand, it rebelled against the prolonged restraint, and condemned its master—since he must write of every-day life—to a confusion of ideas and expressions.

So much was said in the nineteenth century, so much will probably continue to be said in the twentieth century, of the sovereign effect of classical education on the mind of man, that the case of Lord Lytton has too long escaped notice. A classical education, so we are told, has a two-fold effect (like some springs at Homburg): if a mind is flabby the classics brace and strengthen it, if exuberant and somewhat undisciplined the classics steady and chasten it. Without the classics no man can write English. English without a stiffening of Latin and Greek is like a plant requiring support; it sprawls ineffectively; whereas, when braced up by its only possible supporter it will look well and perhaps bear good fruit. The opposite school of thought disdains metaphor, and maintains that a language which cannot be perfectly mastered except by the aid of two other languages, both dead, is itself not fit to live. It also rejects with scorn the idea that English must always remain in the subordinate and degraded position that votaries of the classics consider its proper place.

According to Mr. Isaac Todhunter, the issue was not fairly joined until the year 1861. We may accept this date from so eminent an authority as trustworthy; it gives exactly forty years of conflict up to the present moment, during which time the case of Lord Lytton

has never been cited by the eager combatants on either side.

His education was exclusively classical; it was conducted firstly at a classical seminary, and later at Trinity and Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He was awarded a Chancellor's medal, and although he did not distinguish himself otherwise (except at the Union) he always posed as essentially the man with the "education of a gentleman." Yet if we examine his writings we find a very melancholy series of compositions. Just as the young orator begins "Good Heavens, Sir!" when addressing the Speaker, while the maturer man adopts a less impassioned exordium, even so are we prepared to find very young writers indulging a weakness for italics, notes of exclamation, and little comments in two or three foreign languages. But we do not expect to find a practised writer allowing himself to write "Diavolo!" or "tout Paris" or "auf Wiedersehen!" when the rest of the page purports to be written in English.

So far from endeavouring to weed these schoolboy tricks out of his pages, Lytton relied a great deal upon their effect, and very wisely, no doubt. He was addressing ignorant readers who had a few shillings to spare, and were for the first time in their history prepared to read fiction. He fooled their taste to the top of its bent. The odd little tags in Greek, Latin, French, German, and Italian with which he filled his pages were found to be very acceptable. Lytton discovered his public early, and it never deserted him. His hold upon it was unshakable, and his business instinct told him as much; but he must not only have felt sure of his readers—he must have felt considerable contempt for

them (and perhaps for himself) before he could venture on a grimace like the twenty-seventh chapter of *Paul Clifford*.

CHAPTER XXVII

Caliban. Hast thou not dropped from heaven?

—*Tempest.*

Peter McGrawler. ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !

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Lytton was paid about one thousand pounds for each of his novels. The books contained some forty chapters apiece. Consequently, if he could persuade his public to accept a deplorable antic like this, and pay him twenty-five pounds for it, he was quite right in putting no more into the twenty-seventh chapter of *Paul Clifford* than a line from Shakespeare, and 106 notes of exclamation. But what has become of the dignity, the polish, and the self-restraint that we are given to understand are inevitably acquired by the study of the best classical models?

Lytton was neither ignorant, nor untrained, nor inexperienced. He deliberately wrote down to the level of the paying public of his day. For example:

"There is a certain tone about London society which enfeebles the mind without exciting it; and this state of temperament, more than all others, engenders satiety." This profound reflection occurs in the novel of *Godolphin*, which was dedicated to Count D'Orsay. The dedication probably increased the sales considerably. There is something great about audacity when it rises to such heights, though the quality which brought Lytton a considerable income proved his ruin as a man of letters. He accustomed himself from early manhood to write his worst and to thrive by the process; and there came in his latter days a time when he might in the maturity of his powers have written something really great. The opportunity was there, but Lytton had ruined himself mentally, and the *Parisians* was a failure. This novel, taken in contrast with the rest of Lytton's work, tells in forcible language an old tale, often forgotten, but ever true. For Lytton, it had been the choice of Hercules. He might learn to write well, but clearly (after *Pelham*) he could safely throw style to the winds. He could sell whatever rubbish he chose to write as fast as his pen would travel. It did not matter if the social and moral reflections were babyish; it did not matter if the plot wandered; it did not matter if a glossary was wanted for the thieves' slang—all was swallowed whole by a greedy public. He did not require to polish his dialogue; his cheap sneers were accepted eagerly for philosophy. He wrote much of love-making, and he wrote in such a fashion that we hurriedly turn the pages to escape from the distressing scenes. His heroines are mostly consumptive, and his heroes are always in some doubt as to whether or no they really are attached

to the young lady whom they are addressing at the moment. We turn with hope to the scenes of foreign travel, and we wish that we had stayed in England, however trying the company there might have been. Lytton wrote a great deal about foreign travel, and he wrote like a tourist. He wrote also about politics, and he was well qualified to do so. He was one of the very few novelists who have sat in both Houses of Parliament and also held office, but he wrote about politics like a schoolboy. It was not that he could not have done better if he had wished; but the superficial manner paid best. His writing is, therefore, far less impressive than that of Mr. Trollope, who never sat even in the Commons, and who was compelled to study the forms of the House (for the purpose of his novels) under the ægis of Mr. Speaker Brand.

Lytton thought a great deal, and wrote a great deal, about eating and drinking. There is no more difficult subject to approach with dignity. In *Paris*, M. Zola describes a sumptuous breakfast, and notes the effect of the coffee afterwards: "Qui caressait les digestions ravies." One turns with shame from the scene; and very probably M. Zola desired to produce that effect: but at least his method is sound, and his terms of expression apposite. In *Pelham*, Lord Lytton described two young gentlemen feasting in Paris, and contrasted their delicate food with that of their neighbours (English) who were calling for fried soles and potatoes. Fried soles and potatoes is probably exactly what Lord Lytton's readers would have ordered, and they would, perhaps, be impressed with a sense of their rusticity in finding their taste derided by their favourite author. But the incident is not interesting, or amusing, or important.

If these views are sound, what was the secret of Lytton's success? The secret is that he carried on, in prose, the Byronic tradition. There was much in common between the two men. Lytton possessed Byron's prodigality of expression, his undisciplined energy, his sense of the sonorous. Neither man really cared for, or understood, art—not even the art of his own craft. Both men were capable of any height, and deliberately preferred the lower level. Both possessed the gift of posing—for which, perhaps, there were more opportunities seventy years ago than there are now. Lytton, like Byron, contrived to envelop himself and his works in a romantic atmosphere, where both the author and his creations looked far grander than they were in reality.

The days in which Lytton prospered were the great days of English novelists; but nobody cared to carry on the Byronic tradition except Lytton. Even Lytton, industrious though he was, might have failed if he had not woven the supernatural into every work where he could create an excuse for its introduction. Besides the attraction of melancholy, melodrama, passion, and languor, Lytton provided a thrill which was all his own. The "Thing," the "Horror," the "One," which dogged his characters, and which rested in all the terrors of the Unknown—about which pages and chapters were written, but of which nothing was stated definitely, except that it began with a capital letter, excited the nerves of his readers. When a creature like Zanoni assures his pupil that he has lived five thousand years, and adds that after all he cannot penetrate the secrets of the heart of the meanest boor, we feel on good terms at once with the supernatural: after all, it is something like ourselves. It

is in *Zanoni* that we are first introduced to Adon-Ai, a being who was presented a second time to the British public with such appalling seriousness forty years later.

This all-pervading sense of mystery is perhaps the only point which Mr. Calverley missed when he wrote his famous lines on Lytton's works:—

"Read not Milton, for he is dry; nor Shakespeare, for he wrote of common life:
Nor Scott, for his romances, though fascinating, are yet intelligible:
Nor Thackeray, for he is a Hogarth, a photographer who flattereth not:
Nor Kingsley, for he shall teach thee that thou shouldest not dream, but do.
Read incessantly thy Burke; that Burke who nobler than he of old,
Treateth of the Peer and the Peeress, the truly Sublime and Beautiful:
Likewise study the 'creations' of 'the Prince of Modern Romance';
Sigh over Leonard the Martyr, and smile on Pelham the puppy:
Learn how 'love is the dram-drinking of existence';
And how we 'invoke in the Gadara of our still closets,
The beautiful ghost of the Ideal, with the simple wand of the Pen.'
Listen how Maltravers and the orphan 'forgot all but love,'
And how Devereux's family chaplain 'made and unmade kings':
How Eugene Aram, though a thief, a liar, and a murderer,
Yet, being intellectual, was among the noblest of mankind.
So shalt thou live in a world peopled with heroes and master-spirits;
And if thou canst not realise the Ideal, thou shalt at any rate idealise the Real."

Nothing is missed here except Lytton's remarkable command of the machinery of the supernatural, and the amount of attention which his mysteriousness won

for him at a time when all the men and women of his public were easily attracted by hints of the Unrevealed. It was, no doubt, good to read of Romance; but much better to read of Romance written by one who "could an' if he would" tell of the Impossible and the Unimagined.

Before we consider what Lord Lytton might have done, had he been born in 1850 instead of 1803, let us consider what he might have done had he not deliberately debauched his intelligence by writing down to the level of a public which he despised. There came a time—1870—when a great thing had to be written: it has not been written yet. The drama, or melodrama, of the Second Empire is full of light and shadow—a magnificent subject. France, the land of charm, gallantry, and romance, was still ruled by an Emperor. That Sovereign's government has been denounced with invective so fierce that it calls for courage to maintain that the invective is unnecessarily fierce. The Court, we are told, was tawdry; but it was as magnificent as expenditure could make it, and we in England were not ashamed to copy its fashions. A magnificent French Court must have been a wonderful sight; and Lytton knew it, and might have described it. The Emperor, we are told, was a criminal; but he was incontestably a mighty force, if only by reason of that knack of throwing an atmosphere around himself, in which Lytton excelled. And after all he was a man, haggard with the burden of eighteen years of Empire; not such an Empire as we have been privileged to see ruled by one Sovereign for the period of Napoleon's whole life, but an Empire dogged by secret societies, with the memory of Orsini behind it and the shadow of Bismarck ahead, a shadow

growing ever darker and darker as the Empire raced to its fall. There, too, was Paris the beautiful, a capital gay and grand while Berlin was still a provincial town and London the squalid London which Charles Dickens knew. The entrancing beauty of the Empress, and the attractive character of the child heir to the throne—an heir destined to so tragic a fate—engaged the sentiments and the affection of Frenchmen. The sad memories of Queen Hortense dwelt in the land, and the bands played "Partant pour la Syrie" in the evening. We never hear "Partant pour la Syrie" now; the "Marseillaise" has played it down. Everywhere was the Army; the Army of France, hitherto invincible, maintaining the foppish traditions of the Grand Century, a gorgeous array with great memories behind it, and some base ones, but still the Army of France, hastening like everything else that was French, except the inexhaustible charm of the people, to its tragic end, as the patient clerk Von Moltke laboured at returns and statistics beyond the Rhine.

Here are the rough materials of a great romance; and if Lytton had used the opportunities which forty years of literary work must have thrown in his way he might have produced something as great as the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*, or *Esmond*. On the contrary, we find that Lytton's mannerisms are as marked as they were when *Pelham* appeared. We take a page at hazard from the first volume, and we find "café," "sorbet," "petit verre," "savoir vivre," "garçon," "gouvernante," and "coupé." We find during the commotions narrated in the fourth volume that somebody was wounded by an "obus." No sooner does the scene shift, temporarily, to Italy, than we find "contadino," "Eccelenza," "Inglese," "Padre," and

"cognoscenti." "Fanatico" has no deep meaning that cannot be expressed in English, and "maman" is not so different from "mama" that it cannot be safely translated. As regards the action, Lytton was far feebler than Gregor Samaroff.

Where there were opportunities for grand narrative or episode we find nothing more important than duels with "spadassins," bitter reflections by "gentilhommes" of the old "régime," and some comments on England which would hardly find a place in a well-edited school magazine. How is this for the fruits of fifty years spent in living and observing life? "It is very droll that, though the middle class entirely govern the melancholy Albion, it is the only country in Europe in which the middle class seem to have no amusements —nay, they legislate against amusement. They have no leisure day but Sunday; and on that day they close all their theatres—even their museums and picture galleries. What amusements there may be in London are for the higher classes and the lowest."

It is very easy to produce pages of this kind of writing. If Lytton found that his public would buy it he was undoubtedly right to take no more trouble with his work. Literature, for him, was a means to an end, not an object in itself; and if he had lived to-day his resource and audacity would have found even fuller scope. The reward for satisfying the taste of the reading public of the twentieth century is incalculable: where it was formerly counted in hundreds of pounds it is now counted in thousands. Had Lytton lived now he would have seen and seized all his opportunities. The prestige of mere wealth has greatly increased, and Lytton would have wasted no energy over side issues which were important in his

own time. Just at present one public is attracted by long stories in frigid prose about nothing in particular. Lytton would have produced stories of any length about nothing at all. If other people wrote in four volumes, Lytton would have droned through fourteen, or forty if necessary: while the nullity and frigidity of his style would have struck Oxford dumb with envy. Another large public (perhaps the same) loves impropriety presented as a rebuke to impropriety. Lytton would have placed his manuscripts (written to suit this public) in the hands of the smartest criminal lawyer in London. He would have passed nothing for press that his lawyer was not prepared to defend; and when his book appeared London would have been shaken from West to East with one long lucrative shudder of delightedly outraged propriety. When English, correct and incorrect, had been exhausted and had each yielded a large fortune, Lytton would have learnt Scotch. In a very short time he would have produced a shelf of stories in sufficiently good Scotch to pass muster, each flavoured with appropriate maunderings making the narrative suitable for Sunday afternoon reading. They would have had an immense popularity: the sales would have been unparalleled, and Lytton might have bought another estate with the proceeds. When bogies came into fashion, how would the feeble imps of our own time have shrunk abashed into their caverns before the stride of Lytton's majestic spectres! This wonderful man was perfectly capable of inventing an entirely new religion, with himself as the Mage or even the Object of Adoration; in which case there are no limits to the incense which would have been offered at his altar or the gold which would have poured into his treasury.

Is this an exaggeration? Let us consider, then, what Lytton actually achieved. For style he cared nothing: his own manner remained the same, explosive and undisciplined, except in the very rare cases where he was interested in his own productions. As for the matter, there is no subject capable of romantic treatment which this astonishingly versatile man did not make his own. So long as cheap cynicism, paltry witticisms, and little stories about "success in society" paid, Lytton wrote them, and wrote them as well as stories of this kind can be written. When taste grew ultra-Byronic—perhaps under the stimulus of Lytton's writing—Lytton followed it as far as was safe, and then commenced writing for the more domestic public. Thieves' patter was in the fashion for some time, and Lytton promptly showed his admiring public that he knew more about the patter than the thieves themselves. Then came the turn of the historical novel, and *Rienzi*, *The Last of the Barons*, and *Devereux* showed that Lytton could write about any country and any period, and could write quite well enough for his works to sell. His ghost stories scared his readers literally into fits.

So that the forecast of Lytton's fortunes, had he lived fifty years later, may stand. His commercial instincts were admirable, but his works have very little relation to literature. Had he lived now, he would have written English, as he could very well have done in his own time if he had cared to take the trouble. He did not care to take the trouble because it did not pay. In his day the public admired Mr. Thackeray, not for his style, which was almost perfect, but for his teaching (which was entirely harmful), for his knowing way of writing about great people, and for his bois-

terous gaiety, which is positively distressing. What place, then, does Lytton take in the studies of any reader of the future who shall endeavour to master the social life of England in a century which may then be far removed from the memory of man? His place is not unimportant; although there is not much to be learnt about England from his works, two or three points of decided social interest may be noted. The first is the very wide gulf which separated classes from each other. In Lytton's novels we are conscious of the presence of a real "mob," a dangerous class, not arising from temporary slackness of trade, but permanent, and permanently degraded. We are equally conscious of an aristocracy which appears to be an entire stranger to its neighbours of the middle classes. The middle classes themselves are drawn as ignorant and uninteresting, with dingy surroundings and uncouth manners. That Lytton made a considerable fortune out of the middle classes is in itself suggestive. The state of mind which causes servant girls to prefer stories about wicked counts to stories about people in their own rank of life was widely spread, and proved very useful to Lytton. We are also conscious of a marked affectation in manners, and of a grotesque attempt to imitate those manners on the part of people to whom they did not naturally belong. The social insignificance of Germany, and the position of Italy as a dead country full of sentimental memories, is contrasted with the influence of France, which is paramount. In matters of taste and fashion France gave the lead to Europe, and England humbly followed in her wake. Then we are to remember that these novels appeared in the years when Englishmen loved to call themselves "practical," "downright," "common-

sense," and not too sensitive. The note has changed of late years ; but how much diffidence apparently lay behind this confidence and bluster ! Above all, what credulousness—what a longing after belief ! Was all this the last shiver of dying superstition, or was it the first faint breeze before the dawn of a steadier faith springing from wider knowledge ?

THE KINGSLEYS

WHEN lovers of good work acclaim a genius, which is their greatest pleasure, they ask what sort of genius? Because there really are different kinds of genius. When we say that George Eliot wrote like a giant and finished like a jeweller, we do not even liken her calm and statuesque creations to the glittering and resounding romance of Alexandre Dumas. If we have to admit the limitations of Lytton, we can still reserve for admiration his command of melodrama and his inexhaustible industry. So, when we come to the Kingsleys, whose names were once household words, we must needs inquire how much of their fame is factitious? and how far is their neglect deserved?

Both men wrought poetic justice in their stories; both told a story admirably; both had high ideals; both men loved their country passionately; both worshipped English ways with a fervour of adoration that in its very simplicity is refreshing. Henry Kingsley wrote one book of such excellence that one cannot help reflecting how wise a man was Single-Speech Hamilton. Of his other works we must needs conclude that half their number would have contained twice their merit. Thackeray's high level was maintained throughout many years of production; so was Disraeli's: but it seems clear from the thin and unconvincing narrative of most of Henry Kingsley's work that he listened

too eagerly to the voice of the publisher, and was shipwrecked on the rock of over-production.

Charles Kingsley laboured with almost neurotic intensity. The strenuousness of his work is as apparent in his last book as in his first; and the name "Kingsley" stands in its rugged strength for so much in the nineteenth century that the mere juxtaposition of the words "Kingsley" and "neurosis" is hard to bear. Still it is better than that he should be called a "tub-thumper"—as others use. What we all alike mean—those of us who mean praise and those who mean detraction—is that the strength of his convictions and the violence of his expression of them really spoil his effects.

Now, this was a shortcoming which we shall seek in vain in the works of Henry Kingsley. He wrote easily, with an ample, graceful manner, chatting rather than dogmatising, and clearly aiming at leaving on the mind of the reader the impression of an easy-going man of the world, of one who knows a great deal more than there is occasion to express or than it is manners to express, of one who prefers a smile to an argument, and a jest to both. His own creation, Lord Saltire, an enchanting character, of whom we have a slight sketch at the age of twenty-five and a full-length portrait at the age of eighty-five, probably represented to Henry Kingsley's mind the typical English gentleman; and a very fine type Lord Saltire was. Charles Kingsley could never have drawn Lord Saltire. Violent physical achievements and violent mental exertion made up Charles' ideal of manhood. Would it be unfair to say that he had little or no sense of humour?

Of the two brothers, Charles, of course, has left the deeper mark on the century. When we speak of

Kingsley and Kingsleyism, we naturally refer to the Rector of Eversley's work. His name really stands so high and has had so wide an influence that in that tangled mass of conflicting interests and aims which we have learnt to call the nineteenth century, Kingsley (and all that Kingsley stands for) explains far more than the work of greater men.

It is the custom to sneer at him now. Nothing is easier. His exclamatory manner and his astonishing polemics are enough to set most people smiling, but for the few who can see through little (and even great) mannerisms there is serious matter behind. It is true that his influence is that of a preacher rather than that of a man of letters; but, in point of fact, the novel was the vehicle which he selected for the transmission of his message, and it is hardly possibly to overestimate the good and the evil which that message wrought to his native country and to his time.

We cannot think of Charles Kingsley without remembering Tom Brown. Fierce animal courage and detestable manners—these are, in effect, the test of manhood according to the Kingsley traditions. The schoolboy nourished on *Tom Brown* learnt to look on fighting with his fists as the best possible way of passing the time. Other things in the world there might be. It was decidedly a mark of merit, for example, to be able to throw a cricket ball farther than somebody else. Books, too, although much inferior to fighting as an objective, and although hardly manly in themselves—held, for some reason, a position which it behoved a well-regulated schoolboy to recognise. Perhaps this was because the Bible was, from some points of view, undeniably a book. It would not be permissible to inquire what was the use of the Bible,

CHARLES KINGSLEY
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and so it was better form not to inquire what was the use of books—such books, at least, as Homer and Virgil. Books in one's own language were to be received with suspicion: they would probably be immoral, and were probably bad form. The better side of this depressing picture, of course, is that so much activity in the open air favoured the development of a strong, physical type of youth—very necessary for success in life; while the brutality of manners which went with it really aimed at, and sometimes attained, a frankness and nobility of character which went far to atone for the essential stupidity of the type.

The schoolboy passed from the *Tom Brown* stage to the *Hereward the Wake* stage. He found a literature ready waiting for him. Slaughter is revered in these later works. It is obviously a matter of great regret to Charles Kingsley that men can no longer wield battle-axes and wade ankle-deep in blood. This is to live! So two generations of Englishmen grew up trained to believe in violence of action and carelessness of thought, and really maintaining that it was possible to do right instinctively, or perhaps with the aid of the Bible, which they were expected to revere if they would be "manly," all means of understanding that wonderful production having been sedulously hidden away from them.

When England was half as full as it is now, and the rest of the world was at Englishmen's feet, this school of thought might be—was—retarding, but it could not do us permanent injury. No other school of thought, however, has arisen; and the minds of hundreds of thousands of Englishmen are still consciously or insensibly directed by the conviction that with a cold bath in the morning and boxing lessons

(and the Bible) perfect manhood may be attained; other things signify but little, or are worse than useless.

All this was absent from Henry Kingsley's work. One rises from the study of volume after volume of his chatty romances with the sense that one has been in good company and has not been scolded. Charles and Henry both loved country life and wrote copiously, if not always felicitously, about scenery. But Henry is content to enjoy, and Charles wants to lecture. Metaphorically speaking, he is in a perpetual state of tearing up the grass to see how it is growing. He once described himself as "sensuous" but not "sensual." He is entitled to his opinion, in spite of the doddering maxim that "no man knows himself." Nevertheless, "ascetic" is more the adjective that one would select to describe the output of his genius, whatever the man's own state of mind may have been. In fact, one gathers the impression that most things are naughty. In speaking of a taste for natural science, which he was striving to inculcate in a young man, he adds, "It will help to keep him from brandy pawnee and the pool of hell." "Brandy pawnee" is an antiquated Anglo-Indian term for brandy and soda: an excellent and wholesome drink, though somewhat out of fashion to-day. Pool—though not to be compared with the three-ball game, or even pyramids, and serving mostly as an elaborate excuse for whisky and soda—is a game of skill. Why "pool of hell"? Unless, indeed, the denunciation is metaphorical as well as extravagant, and is to be taken as fulminated against all diversions but slaughter, whether slaughter of men in the name of patriotism or slaughter of butterflies in the name of science.

One is tempted to make these reflections because of the legislative tone of the writings that suggest them. One even feels tempted to contradict in detail the Kingsley decalogue. Thus the cold bath has killed many a promising young fellow. To most of us, botanising and geologising are hardly relaxations —the music-hall and the billiard-room are more interesting. The idealisation of brute force and simplicity of mind is clearly misleading in a day when all warfare is so complicated, so much more the affair of the brains than of the biceps. It is not true that the abolition of duelling has improved our manners; the chief result is that instead of one insolent bully we have a hundred. The other great "abolition" has put the world in a fine pickle. No doubt the earlier abolitionists are quite at home in Elysium; they did not come of a school that was easily disconcerted: but I sometimes wonder how later abolitionists, watching the world that they have left behind them, contrive to sustain in Elysium the gaze of Stonewall Jackson, or R. E. Lee, or John C. Calhoun.

The best way to appreciate Kingsley is to gather up the memory of all the brutal stupidity that is talked in his name; to recall the fine things ruined for want of a little thought; to grow thoroughly exasperated with the effects of the worst side of the Kingsley school— and then, with one's mind at red heat with a passion of impatience, to take up *Westward Ho!*

It is fifty years since *Westward Ho!* was written, and the book is as fresh and great to-day as it was in the days before the Crimean War. Its drawbacks are of no consequence at all, and we realise once more the meaning of the text that the "letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." One of the most stirring of the

late Archbishop of York's sermons was preached against "priestcraft," and was based upon the startling statement that priestcraft was the work of the people and not of the priest. Assuredly Kingsley's worshippers have organised in his name a cult at which he would have stared aghast. They have so assiduously crushed the spirit under the load of the letter, that the name of Kingsley has come to stand for all that most roused Kingsley's ire. A similar transformation may have been observed in the development of other creeds.

It is difficult to know where to place Charles Kingsley's novels. In effect they are sermons. *Westward Ho!* is the nearest approach to a novel that he wrote, and it may be described as an excellent book for boys. *Hereward the Wake* is also a book for boys, but it is not—like *Westward Ho!*—a book that grown-up people can also enjoy. *Hypatia* is eminently a book for grown-up people, and a very serious book too. *Yeast* and *Alton Locke* and *Two Years Ago* are all social discourses, not to say sermons. In all we find the same burning enthusiasm and the same ardent love of humanity. If we must admit that the scandals of the tailoring trade, the housing of the poor, and the horrors of a cholera epidemic are fortunately no longer questions over which we need grow wroth, we must at the same time admit that the spirit in which these distressing calamities were watched by Kingsley is one that is sadly to seek to-day. There, then, is the true place of this righteous man and noble teacher, hideously though his teaching has been parodied by a generation that has too soon forgotten him.

If Charles Kingsley wrote no book as brilliant as

Ravenshoe, his books are of deep and noble intent; and it is a chilly thought that nothing like them could be written to-day, or, if written, published. Enthusiasm, indeed, is not dead, but it is discredited; it is "bad form," except in the case of amusements. The gravity and intelligence with which our generation will discuss the question of handicaps is wonderful to contemplate, especially when we consider the frivolity and impatience with which serious matters are dismissed. Indeed, nothing of the Kingsley fire still warms and illuminates life. Kingsley himself would have heartily approved seriousness over sports, but only as a local manifestation of the spirit which ought to illuminate all our days and deeds. "Be strong," was his favourite maxim. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," was a good text for the guidance of his hours. The intensity of his own life slew him; but, being aflame himself, he set others on fire, and his spirit made itself felt over a whole generation of English thought and action. Each of his books was in turn acclaimed a masterpiece; but if we must select one which may be placed with *Westward Ho!* as likely to captivate another generation of readers, it would be *Hypatia*. This is a wonderful work. It stands in a place of its own by reason of its having furnished an inspiration to the late (alas! that we must say "the late") Charles Mitchell. There are a few—a very few—cases where one art has found the perfect expression of its own spirit in a sister art. Milton and Arne are one in their interpretation of the graceful riot of *Comus*. On tenderer lines Davenant found a perfect interpreter in Hatton. The divine mystery of the sea which Coleridge felt so embracingly is exquisitely rendered

in Barnett's music to the *Ancient Mariner.* The melodrama of the Portuguese Empire is never fully understood until we have heard and realised *Adamastor re dell' onde profonde.* The gorgeous pageant of Bacchus and Ariadne reveals to us a world that only Titian saw; and the same world, tinged, and deeply tinged as it had come to be, with cruel introspection, disfigured with squalid passion, and marred with hideous discords, still looks on us through the dying eyes of Mitchell's Hypatia, and speaks to us through the pages of Charles Kingsley's "novel."

It is in this novel that Kingsley is at his best; perhaps for the reason that his lack of humour was no drawback to his highly successful attempt to portray a world in which humour was not a conspicuous feature. What is really striking is that (if one who is not a Jew may say so) he has contrived to realise the Hebrew character in a way that Disraeli himself might have approved. George Eliot's Hebrews, for all the patience that she spent in drawing them, leave us unconvinced. Raphael Aben-Ezra, on the contrary, is astonishing. The youngster who brings to Raphael's mother the news of Heraclian's defeat is quite a subordinate character, but how faithfully are the lines of the type preserved! Many English artists have attempted to render sympathetically the amazing vitality of the Chosen People. Few have succeeded. Disraeli's work is authoritative; but then he was a Jew himself. Mr. Meredith's *Alvan* is as tiresome as *Daniel Deronda;* but with Raphael Aben-Ezra we come face to face with a live man. His wild-boar energy, his sumptuous indolence, his instinctive love of all forms of art, his intellectual energy, his biting cynicism, his gay acceptance of ruin, his alter-

nations of profound self-abasement with robust assertions of racial pride—all these things fall into their places, and make up, in the hands of a master, a portrait vivid, convincing, and commanding.

Another and, one would say, a wholly unintended result of Kingsley's work is the strange attractiveness with which he endows the pagan world. The pagan world is dead, and cannot speak for itself. It is customary to reprobate its tone: "The hard pagan world" we are accustomed to call it. We, who have the advantage of living in a Christian world, may sometimes ask ourselves anxiously: Is it possible that the pagan world was much harder than the world we live in? With something of the divination of the seer, Kingsley saw the two at an epoch when one was just merging in the other. He does not spare either; he holds no brief. He tells us of the loathsome slaughter of practically unarmed prisoners in the amphitheatre, and he tells us, with swift, horrid accuracy, of the murder of Hypatia. Which was the more enormous crime? He delights in the murder of Hypatia's murderers; and we share his delight. Yet is it not strange that we should gladly dwell on the murder of a hundred unarmed miscreants calling themselves Christians, and monks into the bargain? Is it not still more strange that the avengers of Hypatia should look so much more noble to us—all pagans that they were — than the Christians who obeyed Cyril? This is an abiding merit of the work, that these violent and contradictory passions find a natural place there side by side. All are rendered impartially, with a savage disinterestedness that is in itself great. It is the fashion to decry Kingsley's historical method, and there is no doubt that as a

historical teacher he was hardly a success; but there is also no doubt that he possessed, in an uncommon measure, the historical mind. "Instructive" is a dreadful word; and yet one must say that *Hypatia* is a work intensely instructive, just as *Westward Ho!* a brighter effort, tells us next to nothing, and is valuable only as a great romance.

Much of Henry Kingsley's work was trivial; Charles was never trivial. Much of Charles Kingsley's work was tiresome; Henry was never tiresome. Charles Kingsley took everything seriously, himself included. Henry is eternally smiling, even though the jest is not always apparent. Charles had no sense of humour; Henry overflows with humour. Lord Saltire is Henry Kingsley's masterpiece; but so many of the characters of *Ravenshoe* live and delight us that it would be no more than fair to say that Lord Saltire is only the finest expression of a type that Henry could not draw, in different poses, too often. Few social studies are of greater interest than *Ravenshoe.* It is a picture of English town and country life at the epoch of the Crimean War. In the middle of the nineteenth century England was enjoying the double advantage of a prosperous country life and a vigorous and flourishing manufacturing interest. In these sumptuous and settled conditions a fine plot is developed. The dialogue is felicitous; and though Mr. Norris is past grand master in nimble dialogue, Henry Kingsley takes high rank after him. Charles' dialogue is somewhat lumbering, and his fine ladies and gentlemen lack inspiration. Now Lord and Lady Ascot, Lord Hainault (a very different personage from Lord Beaconsfield's Lord Hainault), Lord Welter, Lord Saltire, Denzil Ravenshoe, even the slightly sketched

General Manwaring — all these are faithful, distinguished portraits. I suppose that one must admit the plot to be commonplace. It is the old story of the concealed marriage and the substituted heir. There is a wicked confessor, and there is also a jolly priest who is a very good fellow by way of contrast. The incidents are many and exciting, and they play their proper part in the book as illustrations, so to speak, to the story. We have none of the panoramic effect of Charles Reade's work. Above all we have none of the pagan fury of expression which Charles Kingsley loved. It is not trivial work, but a tone of smiling earnestness pervades and lightens the narrative, which moves easily to an agreeable if somewhat obvious end.

As a picture of manners and social history it could hardly be improved upon. If any student of history were to ask in the future of what elements the social world of England was composed at the date of the Crimean War, the answer is that they are all to be found in *Ravenshoe*. There is not a touch of exaggeration, not a false note, not a caricature in the book from beginning to end. *Ravenshoe* contains, moreover, some of the best portraits of children in literature. Passionately though Charles Kingsley loved children, the recording of child life and child language was beyond him. It may be safely presumed that the Charles Kingsley devotees will promptly accuse me of "flinging mud," in that I will not allow their idol all the perfections. Nevertheless, I protest and maintain that the portrayal of child life is a difficult thing. It may or may not be important, but undoubtedly it is one of those things that are revealed to some and denied to others. Even to Titian, who

could paint the Venus of the Uffizi, the Charles the Fifth on the Field of Mühlberg, the Bacchus and Ariadne of the National Gallery, and the queer little swaddled Archduke of the Pitti, even to Titian himself the secret was not revealed as it was to Sir Joshua Reynolds, and as it has been to Mr. Shannon. In literature the number of artists who have appreciated and translated child life is wonderfully small. After all, the Garth children are common little brats. Until Mr. Kenneth Grahame wrote the *Golden Age* we should have had to admit that Mr. Henry Kingsley's pictures of child life were unsurpassable; and to say that Gus and Archie Herries are only a shade less interesting than Edward and Harold and Charlotte and Cecilia, is to give to the creator of Gus and Archie Herries the highest praise available at the moment.

One test that is often applied to authors of all kinds is to inquire, What phrases has he added to the language? or, Which of his characters live? Those who decry Dickens would be astonished to realise how much of their memory of fiction, how many figures, how many incidents, how many phrases, are traceable to the armchair at Gad's Hill. The test is fair. If Coleridge had written nothing but the first stanza of *Kubla Khan* he would still be immortal. Two lines earned for a duke a crown less perishable than the strawberry leaves. We remember the M.P. who wrote, two hundred years ago—

> "Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade;"

and are not at all concerned with what he deemed important at the time—his pay as a member of the House of Commons.

Henry Kingsley

Therefore, if in honest desire to appreciate the great brothers we ask which of their characters live, we are applying a reasonable test, and we find some odd results. If we come to phrases, one phrase is always remembered with glee and malice against Charles Kingsley—"And then began a murder grim and great" —but it is rather remembered against him than in his favour; while Henry Kingsley was not a phrase-maker. Then follows the weightier inquiry, Which of their characters have lived, say, for a generation? Wonderfully few. Let us take Charles Kingsley first. *Alton Locke* undoubtedly lives—as a name: probably few remember the significance of the story which was woven round his career. *Hereward the Wake* has a slightly less shadowy existence. As regards *Westward Ho!* the curious fact remains that the name of the story is all that abides. We remember that it is a tale of "the spacious times of great Elizabeth," but Amyas Leigh does not exist as a personage; Sir Richard Grenvill is quite unconvincing. On the other hand, *Hypatia* lives, and lives more as a great figure than as the type of the wonderful work of interpretation to which she has given her name. The powerful study of Raphael Aben-Ezra is forgotten, except, perhaps, by some High Church functionaries who may condescend to say—referring to his theological reflections—"Ah! Kingsley."

Now those of Henry Kingsley's creations who survive do not attract the attention of such important people as High Church functionaries; but then, on the other hand, they are not spoken of so slightingly. It is with the affection that becomes our reminiscence of old friends that we speak of Lord Saltire, Charley Ravenshoe, and Lord Welter. In effect, most of the

characters (including the children) of *Ravenshoe* live yet; but that is as much as we have a right to admit of Henry Kingsley's work. It may be doubted whether any readers who are not Kingsley lovers remember much about *The Grange Garden*, or *Geoffrey Hamlyn*, or *Austin Elliot.*

So, if we are called upon to place the brothers Kingsley in the world of nineteenth-century letters, we shall have to recall, in reflecting on their lives and intentions, much that is elevating and something that is distinguished. As regards the work of Charles Kingsley, we shall have to say that over-emphasis destroyed the artistic effect that he would fain have produced. A not dissimilar lack of finish is perceptible in the work of Henry Kingsley, owing to his eagerness to produce. A little more mental concentration in the case of both; a little more deliberation in the case of Charles, and a little more earnestness in the case of Henry, and the world of letters would have been enriched by two great artists. As it is—*proxime accesserunt.*

LORD BEACONSFIELD

It can hardly be said that Lord Beaconsfield's position as a novelist is a vexed question, for it is not a question at all—he has no position as a novelist. "Nobody reads me," he himself lamented to Matthew Arnold. Is this neglect deserved?

In the year 1883 Mr. Anthony Trollope published the most damaging of all published judgments on Lord Beaconsfield's novels, not excepting Sir Edward Hamley's. Sir Edward's review was witty and graceful, as was all his literary work, but it is hardly less of a parody on *Lothair* than Mr. Bret Harte's *Lothaw*. Mr. Trollope's attack will serve, therefore, as the most convenient starting-point for an examination of Lord Beaconsfield's work. We shall see whether there be any good in it or no.

After a highly appreciative notice of the novelists, his contemporaries and predecessors, he continues:—

"Mr. Disraeli has written so many novels, and has been so popular as a novelist, that, whether for good or ill, I feel myself compelled to speak of him. He began his career as an author early in life, publishing *Vivian Grey* when he was twenty-three years old. He was very young for such work, though hardly young enough to justify the excuse that he makes in his own preface, that it is a book written by a boy. Dickens was, I think, younger when he wrote his

Sketches by Boz, and as young when he was writing the *Pickwick Papers*."

The facts are, that *Vivian Grey* was written in the years 1825–26, when the author was between the ages of twenty and twenty-one, and that *Pickwick* was written in 1836, when the author was twenty-four. It is not a very material point, and from the serene point of view of middle age we may even concede that it is entirely immaterial; but it is as well to get even immaterial points right, if we mention them at all.

"It was hardly longer ago than the other day when Mr. Disraeli brought out *Lothair*, and between the two there were eight or ten others. To me they have all had the same flavour of paint and unreality. In whatever he has written he has effected something which has been intended to strike his readers as uncommon, and therefore grand."

This last indictment lacks the precision that should characterise an indictment. There is much that is uncommon that is not grand; there are a few things that are grand that are not uncommon. But in truth the whole statement is beside the mark. Mr. Disraeli, as he was then, wrote about railroads and dinner-parties, dances and elections, the routine of public offices, and the vexed questions of the day, such as strikes, hours of labour, the conditions of the life of the poor, the diversions of the wealthy; in short, he wrote of everyday life, of everything that was neither uncommon nor grand. Only he wrote of it all as a man of genius, and not as the scribes: if that is what Mr. Trollope implies, there is no fault to be found with his statement. The supernatural comes into several novels, and in regard to that part of his

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work it may be fairly conceded that it is both uncommon and grand.

"Because he has been bright and a man of genius, he has carried his object as regards the young." There is nothing to be done with this statement except to challenge it directly. It is precisely young people that continue to take no interest in his work.

"He has struck them with astonishment and aroused in their imagination ideas of a world more glorious, more rich, more witty, more enterprising than their own." This would be no bad thing to effect, if Lord Beaconsfield had effected it; but if he had done so, a reference to his novels would be understood, and perhaps appreciated: which it is not.

"But the glory has been the glory of pasteboard, and the wealth has been the wealth of tinsel, the wit has been the wit of hairdressers, and the enterprise has been the enterprise of mountebanks. An audacious conjuror has generally been his hero — some youth who, by wonderful cleverness, can obtain success by every intrigue that comes to his hand. Through it all there is a feeling of stage-properties, a smell of hair-oil, an aspect of buhl, a remembrance of tailors, and that pricking of the conscience which must be the general accompaniment of paste diamonds. I can understand that Mr. Disraeli should by his novels have instigated many a young man and many a young woman on their way through life, but I cannot understand that he should have instigated any one to good. Vivian Grey has had probably as many followers as Jack Sheppard, and has led his followers in the same direction."

There is much here that is negligible, and some-

thing that is not. We may pass by the buhl, the paste diamonds, and the hair-oil, without missing much that is stimulating. But when we come to Jack Sheppard and the mountebank we are face to face with a serious charge, which must be met.

The charge must be met because it is made by Mr. Trollope, but it is almost a waste of time to refute it. The three principal heroes of Mr. Disraeli's novels are Coningsby, Tancred, and Lothair. Coningsby is a penniless young man, educated at Eton and Trinity by the kindness of a wealthy grandfather, and destined for the Church on account of his emotional nature. Under those too facile tears there was concealed a force of character that his grandfather had not suspected. He changed his mind, and destined Coningsby for politics. After which Coningsby changed sides; and, refusing to do his grandfather's bidding, sacrificed his inheritance to his political principles.

If to do this, or anything like this, is to be a mountebank, Heaven send us many such mountebanks.

Tancred is the opposite of Coningsby. He is a young man born to a great position, but terribly perplexed over the inequality of human destiny and the various teachings of the Churches. He determines to seek comfort in prayer to the Most High on the sacred ground of Mount Sinai. He does so, nearly losing his life in the attempt. There is hardly a word in the dictionary less applicable to such a character than "mountebank."

Lothair is a young man who spends a quarter of a million sterling in the cause of Italian independence, and is nearly slain at Mentana fighting under

Garibaldi. Mr. Trollope would have us call him either "an audacious conjuror" or a "mountebank." Whatever Lothair may have been, he was neither of these.

Mr. Trollope's remarks on *Vivian Grey* make one suspect that he has criticised the book without reading it. He says that it is of pernicious example to the young: whereas it must be perfectly obvious to any one who has read beyond the first dozen pages that it is absolutely unreadable by the young. Even those dozen pages, which are about school life, are so grotesquely impossible that few young persons would have patience to get through them. The rest of the book is chiefly about English politics, the mediatised Princes of Germany, and the condition of the Continent after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. It is hard to say why the study of these grave matters should be expected to seduce the young from the paths of virtue. It is true that through all these scenes there moves the figure of Vivian Grey: but the moral of his career is precisely the opposite to that which Mr. Trollope implies. For the story shows what a sad thing a young man will make of life who ventures to act without principle; and it lands the hero at last in such an embarrassing position that the author has no course open to him except to stop telling the story. No moral tale ending up "Thus we see" was ever more laboriously didactic.

This criticism of Lord Beaconsfield's work is examined at some length here because it sums up magisterially, and in literary form, the views which are currently held on the subject. When so accomplished a writer as Mr. Trollope can only make out an adverse case by talking about hair-oil and buhl and

Jack Sheppard, the time may be said to have come when we may reasonably attempt a saner estimate.

Let us try to forget for the moment that Lord Beaconsfield was an Earl and a Knight of the Garter. Let us try to forget that he was of the House of David. Let us apply to his work the tests that we should apply to the work of an ordinary aspirant to literary fame, and simply inquire: What does he write about? and how does he write?

As to matter, two subjects occupy all his novels —the government of this world, and the hope of the world to come. Two subjects also occupy Mr. Trollope's novels—the hesitation of a young lady in her choice among two or more young men, and the hesitation of a young gentleman in his choice among two or more young ladies. By skilfully developing the situation arising from these gentle embarrassments Mr. Trollope produced many charming books and earned £70,000. In any six representative novelists of last century he has a high place, perhaps the first place. None the less will it be admitted that we breathe a larger air in Lord Beaconsfield's work: we shall do so, that is, if he has adequately treated his subject. Here, of course, we come to the grand difficulty of estimating Lord Beaconsfield's work. When *Lothair*, for instance, is under discussion, too often does one hear the comment, "Nobody ever talked like that." The scenes and characters of *Lothair* are so varied that the magisterial "nobody" implies an unusually wide experience of life: but the charge of unreality is a serious one.

It embodies in one word the essence of Mr. Trollope's diatribe, and is probably derived from Mr. Trollope's own stated conviction that he had

inferiors, but no superiors. This is the basis of the angry disdain with which Lord Beaconsfield's work is treated by novel-readers; obviously it is not a conviction that can be reasoned with.

It may be noted that this disdain subsists side by side with a habit of mind which accepts any work of fiction provided that the style is uncouth and that the incidents are sufficiently gross. The readers who accept this kind of book as "so true to Nature" have probably (to their credit be it said) no first-hand knowledge of the life that it pretends to describe. They have also, in all probability, no first-hand knowledge of the working of the Cabinet, or the entanglements of high policy; although they will accept accounts of one kind of life by a presumed expert, at the same time that they reject as "unreal" accounts of another kind of life (equally strange to them) by an undoubted expert.

This inconsistency materially diminishes the respect with which one receives the rejection of Lord Beaconsfield's work on the ground of defective manner.

His style is reasonably good, but it suffers, naturally, from the fact that he was not exclusively, or even primarily, a man of letters. If he had cared to perfect his style he would never have passed a passage like this from *Lothair*:—

"Royalty, followed by the imperial presence of ambassadors, and escorted by a group of dazzling duchesses and paladins of high degree, was ushered with courteous pomp by the host and hostess into a choice saloon, hung with rose-coloured tapestry and illuminated by chandeliers of crystal, where they were served from gold plate."

This is very bad: and here is another passage that,

in a different way, is equally trying. It is from *Coningsby*, and describes a meeting of the Grumpy Club, where Lucian Gay is telling the story of "the very respectable county family who had been established in the shire for several generations, but who it was a fact had been ever distinguished by the strange and humiliating peculiarity of being born with sheep's tails." The head of the family is called Sir Mowbray Cholmondeley Featherstonehaugh, and the story is about as amusing as one might expect. Or take these lines from *Endymion*:—

"Their equipages were distinguished, and when Mrs. Rodney entered the park, driving her matchless ponies and attended by outriders, and herself bright as Diana, the world leaning over its palings witnessed her appearance with equal delight and admiration."

These are faults: and there are many of them. Still, many a man whose reputation stands high commits faults of style that are equally exasperating. For example, Mr. Thackeray's habit of dubbing everybody and everything "honest," from General Webb down to Esmond's mare, frets one more than occasional passages in questionable taste. And there is much to compensate one for these lapses.

There are slovenly passages, it is true, and passages obviously written when he was fatigued, and which he would not be at the pains to recast. We must conclude that he had not a good narrative style. In compensation he could rise to heights that are hopelessly inaccessible to the mere story-teller. The famous passage describing the accession of the Queen is the best example of these:—

"In a palace in a garden, not in a haughty keep, proud with the fame but dark with the violence of

ages; not in a regal pile, bright with the splendour but soiled with the intrigues of Courts and factions; in a palace in a garden, meet scene for youth and innocence and beauty, came a voice that told the maiden that she must ascend her throne."

A passage of surpassing grace, like this, calls for no pleading.

There are others: the prayer in *Tancred*, for instance, where the noble exaltation of the language is made additionally striking by contrast with the business-like courier who tells the pilgrim to "go out by the gate of Sion, pass through the Turkish cemetery, cross the Kedron . . . first path to the right leads to Bethany."

After the meeting with the angel—

"A sound as of thunder roused Tancred from his trance. He looked round and above. There rose the mountains sharp and black in the clear purple air; there shone, with undimmed lustre, the Arabian stars; but the voice of the angel still lingered in his ear. He descended the mountain; at its base, near the convent, were his slumbering guards, some steeds and crouching camels."

As for his "good things," they are as the sands of the sea in number. In his earlier works they are—naturally—exuberant, not to say extravagant; "the dark passion of the rich ragout," from *The Young Duke*, for instance. And this passage lamenting the loss of a good digestion:—

> "No more, no more, oh! never more to me
> That hour shall bring its rapture and its bliss!
> No more, no more, oh! never more to me
> Shall Flavour sit upon her thousand thrones
> And, like a syren with a sunny smile,
> Win to renewed excesses, each more sweet."

This is extravagant nonsense, of course, but it is very light and amusing; and so much nonsense is published that is neither light nor amusing. The man who "offered his grateful thanks to Providence that his family was not unworthy of him" is a charming egoist: hit off in a phrase, where other people labour through volumes without making their effect.

One is continually asked, "Which is the best of Lord Beaconsfield's novels?" Where all are so good it is hard to choose. Perhaps one may arrive at something like an answer by a process of elimination. *Alroy* should at once be ruled out. It is a work of genius, absolutely unique, but only the inner circle of Disraelites will ever appreciate it. *Ixion* is a brilliant skit: but it is only a skit. *Popanilla* and the smaller works are equally unrepresentative. *The Young Duke* is open to this reproach, that Mr. Isaac Disraeli said, on its appearance, "My son Benjamin, sir, has not so much as ever set eyes on a duke, so far as I know." *Henrietta Temple* is enchanting. The late Lord Tennyson greatly admired it: it is a love-story pure and simple.

Why will so few ladies read Lord Beaconsfield's work? No man has written more nobly, more generously, more courteously of women. No man has done so great justice to their influence and their charm. No man has more strenuously defended their right to rank as intellectual beings and not as dolls. For stupid people, in fact, both men and women, he had a horror. As a public man he must have been aware of their existence; but his impatience of dulness is reflected in his novels, where the world appears very much as it must have appeared to Lord Beacons-

field himself, but assuredly as it appears to few other people.

To resume our process of elimination, *Contarini Fleming* must go the way of *Alroy:* not that it is to be named in the same day with that work of genius, but because from its excessive mannerism only the inner circle will ever care for it. Heine thought highly of it.

Coningsby is perhaps the best known of all his novels—by name. For the neophyte it probably contains too much political dissertation; the same remark applies to *Sybil.* *Lothair* has been shouted down, in spite of Professor Blackie; and *Endymion* has been laughed down. *Venetia* is a not very successful attempt to vindicate the character of Lord Byron; it is not a strong book. *Vivian Grey* is crude, naturally; and although it is overflowing with high spirits, it lacks form and is quite unrepresentative. There remains a book that is rarely mentioned, but that should take rank immediately after *Esmond,* if not side by side with that masterpiece—*Tancred.*

Tancred opens with scenes of rich comedy. A coming of age is to be celebrated, and the cook is not equal to the occasion.

"'They have written to Daubuz to send them the first artist of the age,' said Leander, 'and . . . Daubuz has written to me.'"

Leander has come to consult Papa Prevost as to the choice of his subordinates for the great occasion. Prevost had served under Napoleon.

"'It is something to have served under Napoleon,' added Prevost, with the grand air of the Imperial kitchen. 'Had it not been for Waterloo I should have had the Cross. But the Bourbons and the cooks

of the Empire never could understand each other. . . . When Monsieur passed my soup of Austerlitz untasted, I knew the old family was doomed.'"

The chief difficulty was to find a man to dress the table.

"'It demands an artist of high calibre,' said Leander. 'I only know one man who realises my idea, and he is at St. Petersburg. You do not know Anastase? There is a man! But the Emperor has him secure. He can scarcely complain, however, since he is decorated, and has the rank of full colonel.'

"'Ah,' said Prevost mournfully, 'there is no recognition of genius in this country.'"

The difficulty is surmounted, and the scene is transferred to Montacute Castle, where the coming of age is to take place.

To identify the Duke of Bellamont would be an easy matter, but as no key has ever been published, and as it is known that Lord Beaconsfield had no desire to see it published, the least that we can do is to respect his wishes.

There is a short sketch of his family, and then we are taken to White's, where the young fellows are discussing the social event of the moment, the coming of age of Tancred.

"'I suppose old Bellamont is the devil's own screw,' said Lord Milford; 'rich governors, who have never been hard up, always are.'

"'No; I believe he is a very good sort of fellow,' said Lord Valentine; 'at least, my people always say so. I do not know much about him, for they never go anywhere.'

"'They have got Leander down at Montacute,' said Mr. Cassilis. 'Had not such a thing as a cook in

the whole county. They say Lord Eskdale arranged the cuisine for them; so you will feed well, Valentine.'"

There is more bright talk at White's, and then we go down to Montacute, where Tancred's parents are much touched by the offer of the sitting member for the county to resign his seat immediately on Tancred attaining his majority. The festivities have hardly opened before a serious hitch takes place; Mr. Leander wants to see Lord Eskdale. It is not that the people have been impertinent; there is nothing wrong about the fish; it is something far more serious.

"'Leander, my lord, has been dressing dinners for a week; dinners, I will be bound to say, which were never equalled in the Imperial kitchen, and the duke has never made a single observation, or sent him a single message. Yesterday, determined to outdo even himself, he sent up some *escallopes de laitances de carpes à la Bellamont.* In my time I have seen nothing like it, my lord. Ask Philippon, ask Dumoreau what they thought of it! Even the Englishman Smit, who never says anything, opened his mouth and exclaimed; as for the Marmitons, they were breathless; and I thought Achille, the youth of whom I spoke to you, my lord, and who appears to me to be born with the true feeling, would have been overcome with emotion. When it was finished, Leander retired to his room—I attended him—and covered his face with his hands. Would you believe it, my lord! Not a word; not even a message. . . . It is unheard of, my lord. The late Lord Monmouth would have sent for Leander the very evening, or have written to him a beautiful letter, which would have been preserved in his family; M. de Sidonia would have sent him a tankard from his table. These things in themselves are nothing; but they

prove to a man of genius that he is understood. Had Leander been in the Imperial kitchen, or even with the Emperor of Russia, he would have been decorated.'"

The tactful Lord Eskdale gets over the difficulty by assuring Leander that he had been summoned, "not to receive the applause of my cousin and his guests, but to form their taste." Inspired by this lofty mission Leander rouses himself from his lethargy, and the festivities are once more beyond the danger of collapsing.

After feasting came serious talk; it is a question of accepting or rejecting Mr. Hungerford's offer to resign his seat in Tancred's favour. The Bellamonts' heir had been one term at Eton, and afterwards at Christ Church, where his mother had written to him every day. They hoped that he would come of age, marry a cousin, and enter Parliament in the same year, remaining plain Lord Montacute until he became Duke of Bellamont. His docility and silence encouraged their confidence that they would always be able to guide him. Tancred, however, was a thinker: and a melancholy one. So when his father reminded him of his duty to support the State of which he is a pillar, Tancred rejoins: "Ah, if any one would tell me what the State is. It seems to me your pillars remain, but they support nothing; . . . they are no longer props, they are a ruin." The Duke is a good, simple man, who can imagine nothing more profound behind his son's reflections than the desire to "hand us over to the ten-pounders," who, as Tancred rejoins, "do not even pretend to be a State." Summoning up his courage, Tancred breaks the news to his father that he wishes to leave home and see the world—a terrible thought to the Duke of Bella-

mont; who was, however, a very kind man: as a young man he had been bullied by his own father, and he had no intention of revenging himself upon his own son. He at once bent his mind to meeting his son's disconcerting views. "Travel," of course, meant Paris and Rome. "I think, with Brace, Bernard, and a medical man whom we can really trust, Harry Howard at Paris, and the best letters from every other place, which we will consult Lord Eskdale about—I think the danger will not be extreme."

The first step was taken, but it led Tancred nowhere. He must needs begin again. It is not Paris that he wants to see, or Rome. "I propose to make a pilgrimage to the sepulchre of my Saviour. . . . I, too, would kneel at that tomb . . . would lift up my voice to Heaven and ask, What is Duty and what is Faith? What ought I to do and what ought I to believe?"

If the Duke was disconcerted, the Duchess was distraught; and both were perplexed. "It was only last year," mourned the Duchess, "on his birthday that I sent him a complete set of the publications of the Parker Society, my own copy of Jewel, full of notes, and my grandfather the Primate's manuscript commentary on Chillingworth." If all this had ended so disastrously, there was only one course open to the unhappy mother: her boy must see a Bishop at once. Tancred sees the Prelate, who comforts him with the reflection that there will soon be a Bishop at Manchester: to which Tancred rejoins that only an angel at Manchester will satisfy him, and the Bishop reports that Tancred is a visionary.

This is fearful, and the Duke now comes forward with his remedy. Lord Eskdale must be consulted. Lord Eskdale dines with the unhappy parents alone,

and decides that going to Jerusalem is much better than going to the Jews. Advises compliance, upon conditions—Tancred must go in his own yacht. It will take him a year to find one, and in the meantime he must go into Society, where he will forget all about Jerusalem. The Duchess consents, but feels the sacrifice acutely. "Dearest child! I see him surrounded by pitfalls."

He goes into Society—ticketed, so to speak, with his eccentric resolve.

"'Jerusalem?' said Mr. Ormsby, shrugging his shoulders. 'What can he find to do at Jerusalem?'

"'What, indeed?' said Lord Milford. 'My brother was there in '39—he got leave after the bombardment of Acre—and he says there is absolutely no sport of any kind.'"

Tancred is attracted by Lady Constance Rawleigh, and the Duchess is moderately happy at the news.

"'If it only were Katherine, I should be quite happy!'

"'Don't be uneasy,' said Lord Eskdale; 'there will be plenty of Katherines, and Constances too, before he finishes.'"

Now Lady Constance turns out to be a Materialist. Frightful thought! Tancred must flee: he buys the *Basilisk* and applies to Eskdale for letters. Eskdale gives him a line to Sidonia. "I recommend you to go, as he is the sort of man who will understand what you mean, which neither your father nor I do exactly; and, besides, he is a person to know. I enclose a line which you will send in, that there may be no mistake. I should tell you, as you are very fresh, that he is of the Hebrew race; so don't go on too much about the Holy Sepulchre."

Tancred goes, and Sidonia divines his ambition in the famous phrase, "What you want is to penetrate the great Asian mystery." The two men are sympathetic at once; and Tancred would soon be off, but that he has rendered a small service to Lady Bertie and Bellair. He makes that lady's acquaintance, and is at once fascinated. She is the first *femme incomprise* that he has met. Her melancholy answers to his own. They have a common subject of interest in Sidonia, whom Tancred knows and whom Lady Bertie wishes to know. They are much together, and their friendship reveals to Tancred that his goddess is the most inveterate female gambler in Europe; and an unsuccessful one. This, then, is Society! Where all should be spiritual, and women most spiritual of all, it is possible that one may be a Materialist and another a speculator in Narrow Gauges! Away to the desert!

The contrast between the lofty single-mindedness of Tancred and the trivialities of the modern world in which he moves is as clearly marked in the East as it had been in London. In England nobody takes the trouble even to understand his mind. Lord Milford gives up the problem after remarking that there is absolutely no sport to be had in Jerusalem. In the East he is an object of the most eager curiosity, the basis of which is generally the desire to make something out of him. His only guides are his own resolution and the sagacity of his courier Baroni.

"'There,' said Baroni . . . speaking as if he were showing the way to Kensington, 'there is Gethsemane, the path to the right leads to Bethany.'"

A matter-of-fact person like this is of some support to an emotional traveller in strange scenes. It is not only the scenes among which Tancred moves that are

strange to him, it is the people with whom he has to deal. It is chiefly, of course, the different religions of Syria that engage his interest. There are many: the Druses, the Maronites, the Bedouins, the Ansarey, the Hebrews, the Latins, Greeks, and Moslems; each speaks of the other, and all speak to Tancred. The result is a gallery of wonderfully vivid portraits, and a tale of absorbing interest. The chief figures are Adam Besso the banker, his daughter Eva, and his nephew Fakredeen, the Emir of the Lebanon. The last-named is a Shehaab, a most engaging young scoundrel, who fully justifies Baroni's dictum: "I have known a good many Shehaabs, and if you will tell me their company, I will tell you what their religion is." He plots with a Sheikh to have Tancred seized in the desert on his way to Sinai, and put to ransom for two millions of piastres. His plot partly succeeds, and Tancred is wounded and taken prisoner. Besso the banker, who had married the Sheikh's daughter, is highly indignant at the affront put upon any friend of Sidonia's, and sends his daughter Eva to negotiate Tancred's release.

She arrives to find Tancred delirious. While a prisoner he has prevailed upon the Sheikh to allow him to make his pilgrimage to Sinai. It is an impressive incident, adequately handled; I shall not attempt to epitomise it: the immediate result was delirium.

On Tancred's recovery the Emir Fakredeen, his betrayer, who has taken a great fancy to him, invites him to stay in his castle on Mount Lebanon. Tancred accepts with enthusiasm, his warm-hearted nature responding eagerly to all advances. Baroni is not so sure. "Those Shehaabs," he says, "they are such

a set, always after something." In this instance the Emir is after a loan, which he disguises under endless bright and audacious talk about the regeneration of Asia.

The regeneration of Asia is also Tancred's ambition; but not by means of a loan. He is seeking for some principle that shall compose the warring religions of Asia and unite them in a renovating conquest. His object grows more and more unlikely of attainment as he becomes acquainted with them; and he realises the hopeless tangle that he has set himself to unravel when, after much amusing diplomacy, he contrives to visit the Ansarey. It appears that the Ansarey have preserved, together with the statues of the gods of Antioch, the traditions of the Greek faith. The two travellers have obtained access to the Court of the Ansarey through the clever diplomacy of Baroni, who pretends that Tancred is one of themselves. This deception is easily sustained, as Tancred is a Christ Church man. He has taken high classical honours, and is even more familiar with classical Greek and Greek lore than the Ansarey themselves; so the discovery which so fatally embarrasses the mind of Tancred steadies the mind of Fakredeen. Clearly there is no chance of wheedling a loan out of Tancred, so his friend throws him over, maligns him to the Queen of the Ansarey, and procures an order for the execution of Eva, daughter of Adam Besso, who has fallen into the hands of the Ansarey, and of whom the Queen is jealous. He then helps Eva to escape, in order to earn the gratitude of her father, and leaves Tancred alone at the Court of the Ansarey to get out of his difficulties as best he may. The difficulties are serious: for the Pasha, with five thousand regulars,

marches from Aleppo to chastise the Ansarey for some little irregularities. Tancred stands by the Queen, and guides her troops to victory; but being cut off, he makes his way to the Desert and thence to Jerusalem. At Bethany he encounters Eva Besso, whose fortitude and intelligence have long commanded his devotion. In the midst of a passionate declaration he is surprised by a certain tumult attending a procession of personages through the olive-trees: the Duke and Duchess of Bellamont have been unable to restrain their anxiety any longer, and have come to Jerusalem to look after their son.

This fragmentary sketch must serve as a hint of the kind of plot that Lord Beaconsfield loved to develop. There are galleries of portraits, much bright talk; lofty scenes, lofty objects. It is as different from the curate-and-tea-party novel as can possibly be. Not that the curate-and-tea-party novel is not admirable: it is very soothing; but it is not of Disraeli's art. There is a cabbage by Mieris, and it is very precious; but there is also a feast by Veronese, which is perhaps nobler art.

Let us now consider Lord Beaconsfield's novels as vehicles of political information. In examining their value as social sketches we took for our starting-point the most damaging criticism of them ever published. Now that we are endeavouring to determine whether the student of politics may profitably read them or no, let us say at once the worst ever said of him. It is easily said; it is but one word—"Charlatan!"

We shall do no harm by getting to facts at once. Take this passage from *Coningsby*, written in 1843:—

"'You will observe one curious trait,' said Sidonia to Coningsby,—'in the history of this country: the depository of power is always unpopular; all combine

against it; it always falls. Power was deposited in the great barons; the Church, using the king for its instrument, crushed the great barons. Power was deposited in the Church; the king, bribing the Parliament, plundered the Church. Power was deposited in the kings; the Parliament, using the people, beheaded the king, expelled the king, changed the king, and, finally, for a king substituted an administrative officer. For one hundred and fifty years power has been deposited in the Parliament, and for the last sixty or seventy years it has been becoming more and more unpopular.'"

This is a good example of the writing that rouses the wrath of Lord Beaconsfield's critics. "Here," they say, "is a passage reviewing, or pretending to review, a long period of history, parading much knowledge, apparently profound but really superficial, and leading through much shallow rhetoric to an unsound conclusion."

At page 482 of volume i. of Dr. Stubbs' *Constitutional History of England*, 1897 edition, there is this passage:—

"The royal power has curbed the feudal spirit and reduced the system to its proper insignificance. The royal power, having reached its climax, has forced on the people trained under it the knowledge that it, in its turn, must be curbed, and that they have the strength to curb it. The Church, the baronage, and the people have found by different ways their true and common interest. This has not been done without struggles that have seemed at certain times to be internecine. The people, the baronage, and the Church have been severally crushed, reformed, revived, and reorganised. More than once the balance of forces has been

readjusted. The Crown has humbled the baronage with the help of the people, and the Church with the help of the baronage. Each in turn has been made to strengthen the royal power, and has been taught in the process to know its own strength. By law the people have been raised from the dust, the baronage forced to obedience, the clergy deprived of the immunities that were destroying their national character and counteracting their spiritual work. The three estates, trained in and by royal law, have learned how law can be applied to the very power that forced the lesson upon them."

Allowing for differences of style, these two passages are identical; and we may contemplate with altered feelings the word "charlatan."

It would not be sound to maintain that all the political views put forward in the novels are as easily justified as this. As the important characters are mostly political personages, they naturally put forward highly conflicting opinions; and the author himself put forward some that were startling. Here we come to Lord Beaconsfield's limitations as a historian. His qualifications it is unnecessary to enumerate; his limitations are two: dearly he loved a good phrase, dearly he loved a good fighting position. Therefore when he came to sum up the Revolution of the seventeenth century, we need not be surprised to find the famous conclusion: "Rightly was King Charles surnamed the Martyr, for he was the holocaust of direct taxation."

After all, one does not go to novels to do lessons; so the historical lore of Lord Beaconsfield, whether it receives support from recognised authority or not, is of minor importance when compared with his

plots. He chose youths for his heroes, and cared little whether they succeeded or failed, so long as they were energetic. He was uninterested in self-indulgent youth, whether the indulgence was gross or gentle. They must possess as much as possible of the energy of his own mighty race before he cared to study their careers. They must be intelligent, resolute, honourable, and adventurous. Coningsby, obedient to his grandfather and taking his principles from the head of his house, would have been dismissed in a paragraph; but the whole of Coningsby's character leads up to the scene where, in reply to Lord Monmouth's orders, Coningsby plucks up courage to say:—

"'I have no wish to enter Parliament.'

"'What?' said Lord Monmouth.

"'I feel that I am not yet sufficiently prepared for so great a responsibility as a seat in the House of Commons,' said Coningsby.

"'Responsibility!' said Lord Monmouth, smiling; 'what responsibility is there? How can any one have a more agreeable seat? The only person to whom you are responsible is your own relation, who brings you in. And I don't suppose there can be any difference on any point between us. . . . All you have got to do is to vote with your party. . . .'

"'You mean, of course, by that term, the Conservative party?'

"'Of course; our friends.'

"'I am sorry,' said Coningsby, rather pale, but speaking with firmness, 'I am sorry that I could not support the Conservative party.'

"'By God!' exclaimed Lord Monmouth . . . 'some woman has got hold of him and made him a Whig.'

"'No, my dear grandfather,' said Coningsby, scarcely

able to repress a smile, serious as the interview was becoming, 'nothing of the kind, I assure you. No person can be more anti-Whig.'

"'I don't know what you are driving at, sir,' said Lord Monmouth, in a hard, dry tone."

Coningsby endeavours to explain, and Lord Monmouth tries to follow him.

"'You mean giving up those Irish corporations?' said Lord Monmouth. 'Well, between ourselves, I am quite of the same opinion. But we must mount higher; we must go to '28 for the real mischief. . . . And it is our own fault that we have let the chief power out of the hands of our own order. It was never thought of in the time of your great-grandfather, sir. And if a Commoner were for a season permitted to be the nominal Premier to do the detail, there was always a secret committee of great 1688 nobles to give him his instructions.'

"'I should be very sorry to see secret committees of great 1688 nobles again,' said Coningsby.

"'Then what the devil do you want to see?' said Lord Monmouth.

"'Political faith,' said Coningsby, 'instead of political infidelity.'"

This idea takes some developing, and Lord Monmouth announces, in return, his own political faith.

"'You go with your family, sir, like a gentleman; you are not to consider your opinions, like a philosopher or a political adventurer.'

"'Yes, sir,' said Coningsby with animation, 'but men going with their families, like gentlemen, and losing sight of every principle on which the society of this country ought to be established, produced the Reform Bill.'

"'Damn the Reform Bill!' said Lord Monmouth.

'If the Duke had not quarrelled with Lord Grey on a Coal Committee we should never have had the Reform Bill, and Grey would have gone to Ireland.'"

Coningsby stands to his guns, but Lord Monmouth has had enough of being heckled by his grandson, and he concludes the interview by saying: "I tell you what it is, Harry; members of this family may think as they like, but they must act as I please." Coningsby disobeys, and is disinherited; but he succeeds in the end through the influences developed in the later novel of *Endymion*, and summed up in the interview between Lady Montfort and Endymion:—

"'Everything in this world depends upon will.'

"'I think everything in this world depends upon women,' said Endymion.

"'It is the same thing,' said Berengaria."

Endymion succeeds, and Coningsby, as we have seen, and Egremont: but not Alroy, Lothair, or Tancred. It is not success that is the end enjoined by the career of Lord Beaconsfield's heroes: it is the heroic attempting of the impossible for the sake of an idea. If he does not worship success, still less does he worship money. Intellect he cherishes and loves to study. The ordinary stupid person attracts him no more than the ordinary self-indulgent person. He would not have had the patience to produce a Grandcourt, still less could he have drawn "Bel-Ami."

The failures of Lothair best exemplify the statement ventured in this article—that the two subjects of Lord Beaconsfield's novels are the government of this world and the hope of the world to come. These two thoughts occupy all the important characters of this brilliant work, prompt their actions, and inspire their conversation. Lothair is one of the heroes who are

born rich; Alroy, Charlie Egremont, and Endymion are poor. The date of his birth may be taken to be 1847, at the height of the religious agitation that drove one of his guardians into the Roman Church, and caused the other to keep his ward away from Oxford as long as possible. Lothair is eager and earnest, with those decided opinions that mean so much misery for their unhappy owner. At twenty his mind is made up on all important questions. It is a lofty mind; and he intends to devote his fortune to suppressing pauperism and infidelity. Society he does not care for, having been to one party, which he thought "a mass of affectation, falsehood, and malice." It is indispensable to his plans for the world that he should be united to a certain young lady, and here he meets with a difficulty: the young lady's mother interferes and forbids the engagement. Thus all his plans are brought to naught; though one feels that there may be hope for his withered heart, because, when he meets her at a ball, her temper answers to his own.

"'You are a most ardent politician,' said Lothair.

"'Oh! I do not care in the least about common politics, parties, and office and all that; I neither regard nor understand them. But when wicked men try to destroy the country, then I like my family to be in the front.'"

Lothair, having gone into Society to drown care and disappointment, has made some acquaintances since the story opened; and among them are those very "wicked men," with whom he finds that he is much in sympathy. The complication is fearful; but his mind is partly soothed by the conversation of a chance acquaintance who does not know what the Anglican position is. Refreshing ignorance! Lothair often goes to call on her. She is devoted to the cause of

Italian independence, and has many charming friends, one of whom greatly encourages him.

"'The only tolerable thing in life is action, and action is feeble without youth. What if you do not obtain your immediate object? You always think you will, and the detail of the adventure is full of rapture. And thus it is the blunders of youth are preferable to the triumphs of manhood or the successes of old age.'

"'Well, it will be a consolation for me to remember this when I am in a scrape,' said Lothair.

"'Oh! you have many, many scrapes awaiting you,' said the princess. 'You may look forward to at least ten years of blunders; that is, illusions; that is, happiness. Fortunate young man!'"

This is a wholesome atmosphere for a young man hag-ridden by the Roman position; and, taking things more lightly, he finds that there is something in life, after all, despite unkind mothers of charming ladies and the wrangling of learned divines who will not accept the Anglican position. He comes of age; there is a great house party, and Lothair appears to be absorbed in his duties as a host. This luxury and this splendour comfort him but little; and when the call to action comes, it finds him ready and eager. The lady who is so devoted to the cause of Italian independence is one of his guests. There comes to her an emissary; it appears that the hour has come. Funds, however, are lacking. Her own fortune and her husband's are both gone; but Lothair, it appears, has a quarter of a million of accumulations. His lawyer wishes him to devote this to buying a property that will round off his already vast estates; although his guardian would dearly like to see him build a cathedral. Lothair has by this time had enough of religious speculation, and possesses more estates

already than he can look after; so the £250,000 goes to Birmingham, and Lothair accepts the command of a company in the revolutionary army of Italy.

The campaign ends at Mentana, where Lothair is desperately wounded. A decidedly unfair advantage is taken of his enfeebled condition to pledge him, during convalescence, to religious views that he has examined and found wanting. His nervous system gives way, and on recovering his health he takes the first opportunity of evading his companions, who are practically his captors, and escapes to Malta.

Thus he has failed in all his great aims: the Churches will not be reconciled by him; Italy is still without her capital; there is as much poverty as ever. When he re-enters White's, on his return to England, it appears that his absence has been unnoticed—so independent is the world of the devotion of ardent young men. Nevertheless, if he has failed, he has failed in attempting great things, and he is rewarded by the hand of the lady whose consent has been recorded in the famous phrase: "I have been in Corisande's garden, and she has given me a rose."

Professor Blackie went so far as to call this novel "manly"; and what Professor Blackie calls "manly" ought surely to receive our respectful attention. For works of such eminent merit a long life is assured. They will undoubtedly outlive many books that are now preferred to them. Their high spirits, intense vitality, variety of plot, beauty of language, and lofty tone justify us in calling them masterpieces; and the mental equipment of any generation that neglects to read them will, for long to come, be decidedly the poorer for the omission.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

LORD BEACONSFIELD was the Paul Veronese of English Novelists. It would be waste of time to inquire what artist's name could be bracketed with Anthony Trollope, for Mr. Trollope was not an artist, he was a photographer. It was only for the improvement of his style that he subjected himself to discipline. In this he persevered until he developed a narrative style which, for his purpose, could hardly be surpassed: it is lucid and easy, if somewhat commonplace. For the rest of an artist's work Trollope cared nothing. He did not devise new and startling plots, life as he knew it being sufficiently varied and interesting to satisfy ordinary people. He took pride in remaining an ordinary person himself, and in appealing to everyday emotion and narrating everyday experiences. What he saw he could tell better, perhaps, than anybody else, as Mr. Browning somewhat grudgingly said of Andrea del Sarto. What he did not see, did not exist for him. He had something of the angry impatience of the middle-class mind with all points of view not his own. In *Barchester Towers* he permitted himself to gibe at the recently published novel *Tancred*, and for the author as well as the work he cherished a feeling of contemptuous dislike. There could be no finer tribute to Lord

Beaconsfield's genius. *Tancred* is as far beyond anything that Mr. Trollope wrote as *Orley Farm* is superior to a Chancery pleading; and we have but to lay *Alroy* on the same table with *The Prime Minister* to see where Anthony Trollope stands.

It is more than twenty years since he died, and his work has been going steadily out of fashion every year. It is instructive to consider what kind of work has taken its place. The regrettable outpourings that well-educated people are contented to accept as literature, and to admit to their drawing-rooms, are, after all, a sorry substitute for *Orley Farm* and *Dr. Wortle's School.* Inasmuch as his work is, for the present generation of readers, dead, it may be well to recall shortly the well-filled life and varied labours of the most popular novelist of the nineteenth century.

His life was not long: he died in 1882, at the age of sixty-seven; and to have produced for thirty-five years a novel a year, to have hunted with English and Irish packs for the greater part of that time, to have negotiated postal arrangements with Egypt, the West Indies, and the United States, to have led an admirable domestic life, and to have been welcomed in many clubs, is the record of a life of remarkable vigour and geniality. To say that he could tell what he saw is not to say much when we are speaking of ordinary men. Trollope's life was exceptionally full, and his powers of observation equally exceptional. If all this be true, it may well be asked, Why is such good work neglected? The answer is, It is not that the work is bad: it is because the world in which Trollope lived has passed away. Witness this comment from *He Knew He Was Right*:—

"The Foreign Office is always very civil to its next-door neighbour of the Colonies—civil and cordial, though perhaps a little patronising. A Minister is a bigger man than a Governor; and the smallest of the diplomatic fry are greater swells than even secretaries in quite important dependencies. The attaché, though he be unpaid, dwells in a capital and flirts with a countess. The Governor's right-hand man is confined to an island and dances with a planter's daughter. The distinction is quite understood, but is not incompatible with much excellent good feeling on the part of the superior Department."

To those who remember the Sleepy Hollow of Downing Street thirty years ago, this passage is not extravagant: as a description of the Colonial Office of to-day it has no relation to the facts. And this reflection brings us to the point of considering how far it is true that Mr. Trollope's world has passed away. The question is important; for the answer may explain the artificial air pervading all of this novelist's work. It is not that Trollope saw inaccurately, for his contemporaries—Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example—looked upon him as an impeccable realist. To what, then, are we to ascribe the altered views that are held to-day? Perhaps to the change of public taste which gives a French novelist (with rare exception) a life of hardly more than ten years: more, perhaps, to the changed circumstances in which we live. The institutions to which we are accustomed are in Mr. Trollope's books, and yet they are not: for this very reason his writing is of value to the student of history, social or political.

All Mr. Trollope's characters live under the domi-

nation of four leading ideas: the supremacy of the House of Commons in the government of this country, the authority of the Press, the grip of the Church on the life of the nation, and the prestige of the marriage tie. To take these points in order: a reader under five-and-twenty years of age who takes up Mr. Trollope's novels finds in them little that he is accustomed to when considering the government of his country. Mr. Trollope's young men enter Parliament, or endeavour to do so, with the idea that they are aiming at the noblest position to which an Englishman can aspire, a position where they will be called upon to discharge important duties. There have been many important things done by this country during the last twenty years: the redemption of Egypt, the Canadian Pacific Railway, the conquest of Burmah, the British East Africa Company, Zanzibar, Nigeria, Rhodesia: but the House of Commons has had nothing to do with all this. These are the events which stir the imagination of a great people, which affect their political and material interests, and which affect that far higher interest—the national character—through the consciousness of fine work finely done. The functions of the House of Commons have in these cases been confined to registering or protesting against the work of the men of action. In effect, since 1882 we have lived, for the first time in our history, under Bacon's ideal system of government, consisting of an all-wise Sovereign, consulting with the pick of her subjects, and a House of Commons with full liberty of speech but little or no opportunity for action—for which, indeed, Bacon considered it to be fundamentally unfitted. There has been, of course, one large measure in which the House of Commons was con-

cerned—the Franchise Bill of 1885. This Act, passed three years after Mr. Trollope's death, was expected to produce certain results, and produced very different results. What it actually brought about was the extinction of the middle classes as a political force, and the re-establishment of the government of this country on purely aristocratic lines. Great credit is due to the hard workers among the nobility who have brought about this change. As M. Leclerc points out, they have regained, by public spirit, and by adapting themselves to circumstances, all, and more than all, of the authority wrested from them in 1832. They now rule by merit where formerly they reigned by privilege. The change is to their advantage. "My father has often told me," says Mr. Milbanke in *Coningsby*, "that in his early days the displeasure of a peer of England was like a sentence of death to a man." These evil incidents of privilege exist no longer: in revenge, the aristocracy have torn all power from the middle classes. Thus, whereas in Mr. Trollope's novels we find an idle and uninfluential nobility existing more or less on sufferance in a land controlled by a vigorous and prolific middle class, we see to-day a picture presenting precisely these features reversed: we see an all-powerful nobility controlling a country under universal suffrage, a depressed and indifferent middle class, and a flourishing democracy acquiescent in any rule that leaves them untaxed and provides them with abundance of work.

In these circumstances why should any man, not born in the purple, endeavour to enter the House of Commons unless he be a successful lawyer who desires to be made a judge, or a large employer of

labour who would like to be made a baronet? He must be a dull man indeed if he can find no more amusing place of resort, and singularly incompetent if he can discover no graver duties. The brains of the middle classes go to Egypt, to South Africa—anywhere except to St. Stephen's.

No doubt Mr. Trollope would have portrayed this interesting world had he lived to see it; but it did not exist in his days; nor were there any signs of a revolution of such magnitude in the near or even the distant future.

The authority of the Press is a conspicuous feature in Mr. Trollope's picture of English life. Hugh Stanbury makes a spirited defence of his calling to Sir Marmaduke Rowley, who does not believe in the Press:—

"'If the Lord Chancellor were to go to bed for a month, would he be much missed?'

"'I don't know, sir. I'm not in the secrets of the Cabinet. I should think he would.'

"'About as much as my grandmother; but if the Editor of the *Jupiter* were to be taken ill, it would work quite a commotion. For myself I should be glad, on public grounds, because I don't like his mode of business. But it would have an effect, because he is a leading man.'

"'I don't see what all this leads to, Mr. Stanbury.'

"'Only to this: that we who write for the Press think that our calling is recognised, and must be recognised, as a profession. Talk of permanence, Sir Marmaduke!—are not the newspapers permanent? Do they not come out regularly every day, and more of them, and still more of them, are always coming out? You do not expect a collapse among them.'

"'There will be plenty of newspapers, I do not doubt—more than plenty, perhaps.'

"'Somebody must write them, and the writers must be paid.'

"'Anybody could write the most of them, I should say.'

"'I wish you could try, Sir Marmaduke. Just try your hand at a leading article to-night, and read it yourself to-morrow morning.'

"'I've a great deal too much to do, Mr. Stanbury.'

"'Just so. You have, no doubt, the affairs of your Government to look to. We are all so apt to ignore the work of our neighbours. It seems to me that I could go over and govern the Mandarins without the slightest trouble in the world. But no doubt I am mistaken—just as you are about writing for the newspapers.'"

All this is very courageous, and breathes the very best temper of the English Press—its energy, honesty, enterprise, and independence. There are other sides to the question, however, which Mr. Trollope has not missed. There is the disreputable Press-man in *Phineas Finn;* and there are comments on the *Jupiter* in the case of Mr. Slope, the would-be Dean of Barchester, which show that Mr. Trollope, here as everywhere else, saw things in their just proportion. How different is the status of the Press to-day! Sir Marmaduke would have a far better case against a twentieth-century Stanbury seeking the hand of his daughter. There are plenty of newspapers—"more than plenty," as Sir Marmaduke prophesied; but the number of publications with which the Hugh Stanburys care to be associated has not materially increased. A view of the Press which only comprises

on the one hand the Hugh Stanburys, and on the other the blackmailer (actual or potential in both cases), leaves unconsidered the greater part of the English Press of the twentieth century. Appeals to the vanity and inquisitiveness of a large public with small sums to spend on so-called literature have proved to be very remunerative. Such journalistic enterprises have multiplied with great rapidity. The few periodicals which still maintain the nobler traditions of the English Press are now but a small, if important, fraction of the whole. Although the better part of the English Press is still the best in the world, and the worst part is very far from being as bad as much of the Continental Press, nevertheless the phrase "to be connected with the Press" is not necessarily a recommendation in the twentieth century: it remains to be inquired "What sort of Press?" Its actual influence is also less than it was half a century ago: probably the only considerable event directly traceable to the Press in our own time was the stoppage of the Channel Tunnel scheme.

The ground becomes more and more controversial as we proceed. We now come to the English Church as presented to us by Mr. Trollope and the English Church as it exists to-day. That conspicuous feature of English life is variously regarded. To some it is an institution of Divine origin. To others it is a harmless body, composed of men who may do useful work and save the taxpayer's money: good men provided that they do not take themselves too seriously To others it is a decaying organisation chiefly occupied in propagating the belief in obsolete fables: it is an encumbrance which England has inherited from the past, not so picturesque as Rouge Dragon and Port-

cullis, but far more objectionable, because it is more in evidence and has more authority than those amiable officials.

Whatever it may be to-day, there is no doubt that it has had great influence in England for thirteen hundred years: the position of the Church in any given century has to be considered before any just appreciation of the century can be attained. What was the position of the Church of the nineteenth century? According to Mr. Trollope it was nothing less than the soul of the nation. Mr. Trollope has been called here a photographer, but not from any desire to depreciate either Mr. Trollope or the pursuit of photography. The word describes Mr. Trollope's mind. It was incapable of distortion or exaggeration: it lacked the necessary originality. It reflected exactly, and his pen recorded exactly what his mind reflected. Consequently, if Mr. Trollope tells us that the Church was the soul of the people, we may be very sure that it was. On what does the credibility of the phrase rest? It rests on the numerous portraits of clergymen which are to be found in his novels, and on the general tone of his characters when religious matters are under discussion. Francis Arabin, Mr. Septimus Harding, Mr. Crawley, Archdeacon Grantly, and the Vicar of Bullhampton (who has a novel all to himself)—these are some of many. Of course there were others: creatures like Obadiah Slope and Groschut, fossils like Mr. Prebendary Stanhope. Mr. Trollope knew them all; and the prevailing type, we are given to understand, was of the better sort. What a type it was! For learning, devout life, knowledge of men, charm of manners, and commanding character it was probably unrivalled in

history. The general impression of the Church of the nineteenth century is that of an army with undistinguished chiefs, but containing an admirable rank-and-file superbly officered. The Church of the twentieth century presents, on the contrary, the spectacle of brilliant generals of division supported by shaky brigadiers, and commanding a rank-and-file of which nothing can be said with certainty. The best brains of the nineteenth century went to the Church: the Church of the twentieth century deliberately discourages intellect. This is not the place for inquiring why: it is merely the place for noting the fact. In Mr. Trollope's novels we get an impression totally different from that which is produced to-day by the facts around us. This is not because Mr. Trollope saw or recorded falsely: it is because the times have changed.

Not so materially, but still to a considerable extent, have ideas changed on the subject of marriage. In Mr. Trollope's novels it appears as the most important event in life. Mr. Trollope always treats marriage seriously; not from any desire to moralise, but merely because it was so treated in the world he lived in, and because he had to set down what he saw. One result of this is a remarkably pleasant flavour in all his books; but another result is to accentuate our sense, in reading them, that times have changed. For Mr. Trollope, the man who does not marry is a selfish debauchee; the girl who does not marry is a spiteful vixen. That cannot be said to-day with any approach to truth. That there will always be spiteful vixens and selfish debauchees is as certain as that the world will never be rid of other nuisances, like thistles and brambles. Every unmarried man,

however, is not a selfish debauchee, and every unmarried woman is not a spiteful vixen. Many good men remain unmarried; the general reason assigned by the trivial, being that they prefer the luxury of their clubs to the refinement and comfort of a home. Anybody who understands dining will ridicule such a statement. No club dinner is comparable with what can be enjoyed in a well-ordered home: the reasons are obvious; and if it were merely a question of dining, all men of fine taste would marry. It is something far more important than that. The altered ideas on the subject of marriage that have produced the large, if somewhat uninteresting, celibate population of these islands are traceable to the domestic legislation which was put in hand the year after Mr. Trollope's death.

That legislation was devised with admirable intentions, and has no doubt fulfilled its objects; but the laws, the general body of opinion which has grown up in line with those laws, and the teaching of some social prophets, have produced the effect that marriage, like the House of Commons, has somewhat lost its prestige. It is an "honourable estate," we are told at the altar. No doubt; but, like everything else in our time, it is being examined somewhat critically, and by many it is considered (as Cheviot Hill says in Mr. Gilbert's comedy) "an unreasonably long time to be answerable for another person's expenses." In Mr. Trollope's novels marriage appears as a duty. It is treated to-day as an episode, agreeable or the reverse, profitable or the reverse; but it is only one episode in life among many, and no sense of duty performed or neglected attaches to it.

By a different process of reasoning, perhaps, large

numbers of women decide to remain celibate, not (as in Mr. Trollope's time) from inherent viciousness, but because the unmarried state appears more interesting.

It is not likely that Mr. Trollope's novels will have any vogue in the immediate future. Every page brings its own flavour of unreality, traceable perhaps to the considerations here set forth; although the very cogency of these considerations makes the novels invaluable to a student of history. The whole of the century is there, with the exception of the last twenty years.

The reader of to-day who accepts these limitations will not find that Mr. Trollope wrote too many books, or that his books were too long; but he must make up his mind to some omissions as well as some limitations. He will not find any religious or quasi-religious disquisitions posing as prophecy. He will not be asked to believe that people who talk vulgarly or ungrammatically are, for that reason, more deserving of attention than people who speak English correctly. There is an entire absence of violent language. What are known as "strong situations" are rare. There are none of those quaint odours (some, but not all, odours of the hothouse) which waft through the pages of modern novels. Mr. Trollope did not like "problems." The Bible and the Church Service, on important occasions, and the conduct of a gentleman in smaller matters, were infallible rules for him. There was, therefore, not much room for "problems" in the world as he saw it. He did indeed treat of one "social question" in *The Vicar of Bullhampton*, and his action in doing so was considered at the time to be rather startling; but we who have read *Flames* will probably not find the earlier novel very alarming.

A novelist's view of himself cannot but be interesting. Mr. Trollope has left it on record that, if he is to "live," it will be through the character of Planty Pal. Some nicknames are engaging: "Planty Pal" is not. It is an abbreviation of Plantagenet Palliser, the great-nephew and successor in title to the Duke of Omnium. When Mr. Trollope rested his hopes of fame on the character of Plantagenet Palliser he forgot, perhaps, how he had himself written of his hero in *The Small House at Allington:* "He was a thin-minded, plodding, respectable man, willing to devote all his youth to work, in order that in old age he might be allowed to sit among the Councillors of the State."

How is it possible to make anything out of a man like that? "The last infirmity of noble minds" never produced so doddering a gait as in the case of Planty Pal. A man who owns many horses, but does not ride or race, and boasts that he knows nothing about them except that all have heads and some of them, he believes, tails; a man who has good coverts and never shoots; a man who dines alone in the library off a chop and a glass of sherry and apollinaris, or who dines in company off the first thing offered him and refuses all the rest—such a man is really not worth writing about. We are given to understand that he was clever as well as industrious, and he certainly refused the Chancellorship of the Exchequer (under circumstances highly honourable to himself) while still quite a young man. But it appears that his attention was chiefly occupied with the substitution of an imaginary coin, called a "quint," for the farthing, and generally with the reorganisation of the currency on the decimal system. We are also given to understand

that he was a high-spirited man who would not brook interference; although the evidence laid before us does not carry much weight. Let us consider two illustrations of his independence of character; one from his private, the other from his public, life. The first is perhaps the more remarkable of the two. His uncle the Duke of Omnium was a lifelong friend of the Marquis of Hartletop, whose son Lord Dumbello married Griselda Grantly. When Lady Dumbello had been married two years people had "begun to talk" about her and Plantagenet Palliser. The gossip had no foundation, but the Duke told his nephew that he would take it as a favour if he would stay away from Hartlebury for a time. Mr. Palliser immediately showed his independence of character. He took the earliest opportunity of making it clear to Lady Dumbello that his intentions were strictly dishonourable. It is not surprising that she put an end to his languid attentions by ordering him to find her carriage. Plantagenet could have chosen no worse occasion for the display of the respectable quality of independence of character.

The illustration of Palliser's fine character drawn from his public career is his declaration as Duke of Omnium that "he never asked for anything in his life." This is a grand thing for any man to be able to say, if he can say it truly; but why should we be called upon to respect a man like Plantagenet Palliser for not asking for good things? Seeing that Fortune had showered upon him with both hands all that life has to offer; seeing that he was always wealthy, and came to inherit castles and moors and palaces, with wealth beyond computation, and that his wife brought him another enormous fortune; seeing that he was,

without any trouble to himself, one of the greatest subjects in the world, and that he had nothing to desire in life except the Garter—which he refused—what can we say of a man who, placed like this, boasts that he never asked for anything?

In offering this unfavourable view of Plantagenet Palliser it is not implied that Mr. Trollope saw him inaccurately. On the contrary, every incident of his career is consistent. We may recognise the excellent work without admiring the subject. It is noteworthy that Mr. Trollope should have written as he did of so tedious a person, for at the close of the Dumbello imbroglio he has thrown off two incidents which by this contrast describe a really fine and sturdy character. Mrs. Grantly had sent a tender note of remonstrance to her daughter regarding the rumours which had reached the Rectory. To this Lady Dumbello had replied:—

"DEAR MAMMA,—I thought it best to show your letter at once to Lord Dumbello. He said that people would be ill-natured, and seemed to think that the telling of such stories could not be helped. As regards you, he was not a bit angry, but said that you and papa had better come to us for a week about the end of next month. Do come. We are to have rather a large dinner-party on the 23rd. His Royal Highness is coming, and I think papa would like to meet him. Have you observed that those very high bonnets have all gone out? I never liked them; and as I had got a hint from Paris, I have been doing my best to put them down. I do hope nothing will prevent your coming.—Your affectionate daughter,

"G. DUMBELLO.

"CARLTON GARDENS, *Wednesday*."

On this the Archdeacon said to his wife, "If you want to go to town at all, I will take rooms for you. And for his Royal Highness! I have a great respect for his Royal Highness, but I do not in the least desire to meet him at Dumbello's table."

There was no kinder or more generous father in England than Archdeacon Grantly; but he would not be a guest—not even "to have the honour of meeting"—in a house where he knew the hostess to be a heartless little snob, even though she was his own daughter.

Plantagenet Duke of Omnium is a great piece of work; but he is not what Mr. Trollope thought he was. Mr. Trollope read in much between the lines; but his pen could only write what was there. He intended to write down the high-minded noble, but his relentless pen has written down the Prig Unspeakable instead. We are favoured with some fragments of his conversation; he was not a talkative man, but during a life of thirty years (from five-and-twenty to five-and-fifty) it was necessary for him to open his lips occasionally. Whenever he does so he gives us the same impression of arid conceit. Take this incident from his early life. He pays a visit to a country house—Courcy Castle—and spends the time in his rooms over Blue-books. When he descends to the drawing-room he continues reading:—

"Plantagenet Palliser skimmed through his little book, and probably learned something. When he put it down he sipped a cup of tea, and remarked to Lady de Courcy that he believed it was only twelve miles to Silverbridge [this is where he was engaged to speak at a political meeting].

"'I wish it was a hundred and twelve,' said the countess.

"'In that case I should be forced to start to-night,' said Mr. Palliser.

"'Then I wish it was a thousand and twelve,' said Lady de Courcy.

"'In that case I should not have come at all,' said Mr. Palliser. He did not mean to be uncivil, and had only stated a fact."

Any comment would take away from the force of that admirable touch, "He did not mean to be uncivil, and had only stated a fact." No wonder that his wife found him intolerable; no wonder that when he came, by sheer lapse of time spent in office, to be Prime Minister in a Coalition Cabinet, the promising coalition went to pieces as fast as possible.

Among the ladies two portraits stand out—Mrs. Proudie and Lily Dale. Lily Dale remained the ideal of a whole generation. Her sad story is soon told. She became engaged as a young girl to a man of whom much might be said. Adolphus Crosbie was his name. He jilted her; and she remained unmarried in consequence.

Her family were hardly surprised: "The Dales were ever true," was their motto. "I cannot change myself because he is changed," was all she had to say in answer to the eager courtship that followed her abandonment by the man she loved. The character is so gentle and tender that even forty years after it was drawn one cannot refuse a tribute of admiration; it is not the rose, but it is undoubtedly the lily. A more radiant flower was Lady George Germaine, the heroine of an almost forgotten novel, and one of Trollope's most attractive characters.

But for the moment to return to the earlier types. Mrs. Proudie is remembered by many who have forgotten Miss Dale.

Mrs. Proudie was a good woman in the worst sense of the word. Those who pass this great creature by miss a wonderful study. When she died suddenly of heart-disease her bereaved husband prayed "that God might save him from being glad that his wife was dead."

These three characters — Plantagenet Duke of Omnium, Mrs. Proudie, and Lily Dale—are the only three who have in any sense become classic; but there remains a long gallery of studies. Some of these are so vivid that one is almost tempted to withdraw the description of Mr. Trollope as a photographer. All the plots are good: it is never exactly obvious how they are going to end. If one were pressed for the name of another novelist whose work comes near to Mr. Trollope's, one would perhaps choose M. Victor Cherbuliez.

There is nothing in any of these novels so melodramatic as the trial scene in *Paul Clifford;* although there is much excellent work in connection with lawyers and law courts, and, to make a selection where all are of so high an average merit, perhaps *Is he Popenjoy?* is the most readable of all Mr. Trollope's works. It is shorter than many, its characters are all new, and it was published when Mr. Trollope's narrative style was at its best. It would, however, be as easy to abstract an encyclopædia as to abstract a novel of Mr. Trollope's. Never was there so great a master of detail. If he introduces you to a family, it is not enough that you should know the Head of the House: you must know a good deal

of the family history, and be on bowing terms at least with some of the collateral branches. He is careful to inform you of the acreage of the family estate, whether it is profitable or not, how far it is mortgaged, and whether a town house is kept up as well as the country seat. The extraordinary thing is that you can remember this mass of detail. Ten, twenty years after reading the novels the embarrassed state of the Gresham finances is quite easy to recall. The Tregears lived in the country, and therefore did well on four thousand a year; the Longestaffes had three times that income, but were always embarrassed because they would keep up all their places and a house in town as well. One even remembers that Mr. Longestaffe put his coachman into a wig, with some idea that this important step might help him to a peerage. It is the same with the law work. If a case is introduced—or, rather, arises—in the course of his story, you must know the leading counsel on both sides, and he takes care that you cannot confuse them. You must be made acquainted with the points for both sides of the case, and taken in detail through the more important cross-examinations.

Nobody who has once read it can forget the cross-examination of Lord Fawn in The Queen *v.* Finn; that amazing piece of work which tore into shreds the case for the Crown. Nobody can forget that Baron Maltby tried Lady Mason, or can confuse Mr. Justice Staveley with his brother of the Exchequer.

It is the same in city, in country life, in politics, and in cathedral towns. It is impossible to confuse Tringle the millionaire with Melmotte the millionaire. Mr. Cohenlupe sat for Staines; although Mr. Cohenlupe was quite a subordinate figure in *The Way we*

Live Now, it is out of the question to forget the name of his constituency. One knows it as assuredly as if he talked "House of Commons" all through a long dinner-party. Even the very young men who belong to the "Bear-garden" are distinguishable one from another—which is not always possible in real life.

His hold is not so complete over the political world. There is a difficulty in remembering who held the subordinate parts in some of the Governments: though this is the only part of Mr. Trollope's work where the plates are a little blurred. Elsewhere, his detail is as clearly cut as possible. We remember exactly how many children Archdeacon Grantly had, and how many thousands a year income. The Vicar of Bullhampton and the Dean of Brotherton were both combative men, but are no more to be confused than one intimate friend is to be confused with another intimate friend. Mr. Emilius, Mr. Groschut, and Mr. Slope are all advertising clergymen; but who could mistake Slope for Emilius? John Crumb is as different as possible from Sam Brattle; Squire Amedroz a different creature altogether from Squire Dale or Squire Carbury. Lord de Courcy, Lord Brotherton, and the Marquis of Auld Reekie are all invalidish gentlemen with bad tempers; and each is as different from his brother-noble as Lord Trowbridge is from all three.

To remember all this is not a question of memory: it is the result of Mr. Trollope's method. Other writers have gone deep into detail—Lord Lytton for example, and Mr. Dickens; though nobody remembers the detail of Lord Lytton's work; and the detail of Dickens' work is remembered only after long study—the result of downright affection for the man, although

it is thirty years since he left us. With Mr. Trollope it is different. His detail is remembered—cannot, in fact, be forgotten—even although it is often in appearance trivial. Every piece of detail is important and consistent with its neighbour. Even the fact that the Marquis of Mountfidgett "bought a great many marble statues" (which was the Duke of Omnium's contemptuous way of describing a man with a cultivated taste in the fine arts) does not escape one's memory; and the Marquis of Mountfidgett is a character merely alluded to in *The Prime Minister* as a man who asked for the late Marquis' Garter and did not get it.

To say all this, if it be true, is to claim a very high place for Mr. Trollope as a master of plot and narrative; and a very high place is undoubtedly his by right. If we insist on denying that Mr. Trollope was an artist, we must at least admit that his photography was consummate; but if we are tempted to relent, and describe him as an artist, we are at once restrained by remembering the indignation with which Mr. Trollope himself repudiated the idea that he was any more of an artist than a bootmaker.

CHARLES READE

OF Charles Reade's novels we may say, as Abraham Lincoln said of the Panorama: "For people who like that sort of thing, that's just about the sort of thing they like."

Charles Reade wrote two good acting plays, *Masks and Faces* and *Nance Oldfield*, and one great novel—of which more anon—the rest is Panorama.

He died in the year 1884 at the age of seventy, having lived a full, interesting, and occasionally pugnacious life; during nearly forty years of which he enjoyed the pleasures, whatever they may be, of celebrity.

He began life as a brilliant young man, a scholar, and D.C.L. of Oxford. He also took a dilettante interest in the Bar; and that is as much as is to be said for Charles Reade when he entered on his dazzling career. In the course of that career he wrote very well indeed about Australia without having been there; he wrote in great detail about banking without having been in business; he wrote of strikes and "rattening" as if he had been a picketed operative; he described accidents and incidents in coal-mines much better than most men who pass their lives in that kind of work, and even now we are only at the beginning of his astonishing volume of information. His handling of the technicalities of trade is bewildering in its minuteness; Mr. Rudyard Kipling might envy it. His know-

ledge of prison life makes one marvel how it could have been acquired except as a warder or an amateur convict. Lunatic asylums had a special attraction for him; they were fruitful (in his hands) of blood-curdling melodrama, where almost every page contains not only a judicious thrill, but a valuable piece of information (laboriously acquired by the author) and a handsome moral. It is inconceivable that any man could write the sea-fight in *Hard Cash* without having himself commanded, and fought, a merchant vessel. There is not a move in that battle that we do not watch with breathless attention, however often we read it. His descriptions of country life are quite good—more than good perhaps; while on board ship he is convincing and even enthralling. He is equally at home with respectability and with crime; and when he tells us of a forgery it is our own fault if we cannot go away and do likewise; for he writes as one whose only trade was forgery and who earned a handsome income by practising it.

Now the days of man are threescore years and ten, from the cradle to the grave; and his days as a writer of books are but a poor two-score. Consequently, if he is to annex and develop this mountain of miscellaneous information his limitations will declare themselves early and definitely. What is gained in one direction will be lost in another. Moreover, Charles Reade was no slipshod hack. He brought to the work of his life the studious habits of the man of learning. Although we may well open our eyes when we read (in *Foul Play*) that "Our Universities cure men of doing things by halves," there is no doubt that Charles Reade himself laboured with the energy and conscientiousness of a Strafford. So that if, or rather

since, he laboured over detail to an extent that far outdistances any other writer of his time, we must prepare ourselves for what we, in fact, find; namely, somewhat colourless people moving amid accurate and elaborate staging—in short, Panorama.

"I rarely write a novel," he has recorded, "without milking about two hundred heterogeneous cows into my pail." Or again: "In all my tales I use a vast deal of heterogeneous material, which in a life of study I have gathered from men, journals, Blue-books, histories, biographies, law reports, &c." This is very interesting; and tells us much more (perhaps) than Charles Reade intended to tell us. The process which he thus describes, and probably describes without the slightest exaggeration, implies an amount of courage, conscientiousness, and industry that is surely without a parallel. A similar case, however, is that of the illustrious author of *Daniel Deronda*, who told Charles Leland that before writing that novel she had studied 140 volumes dealing with Hebrew lore, Hebrew traditions, and Hebrew aspirations. "I did not tell her," wrote Leland, "that she had far better have talked with 140 Jews and Jewesses; till she had learned to tell (as I can) Señorita Dolores of the Sephardim from Fräulein Lilienthal of the Ashkenazim by the corners of their eyes." The world knows that, whether Leland's advice was right or not, George Eliot's admirable efforts were ineffective; for if any part of her giant work can be said to be blurred it is precisely that over which she took such scholarly pains. The Cohens, Lapidoths, and Pashes, even Deronda himself and his mother the Princess Halm-Eberstein, what tiresome people they all are, even when we realise them; and for the most part, what phantoms!

A method which fails in the hands of a giant may well produce different results in the hands of smaller folk; so we need not of necessity say that Charles Reade's process of "milking two hundred heterogeneous cows into one pail" was destined to fail, because George Eliot christened her great work after Daniel the Shadow instead of after Henleigh Grandcourt—that astonishing creation. But, in point of fact, what is the effect produced by Charles Reade's work? It is that the mustard is good, but the pancakes are naught. The mustard is not only good but of superlative excellence; one actually dines off it, in so far as one can dine off mustard. To quit metaphor, while we read the story, we revel in incident and detail. We positively enjoy the minutiæ; and we study strange and sometimes uncongenial occupations with attention and absorption. The plot is equally exciting. There is no mistaking the villains; horns and tail are clearly visible from the commencement of the story; lights are turned down at their appearance; the orchestra executes a tremolo on the violins; green lights flare. Equally emphasised is virtue. Flowers, and summer morns, and sweet manners and white muslin introduce

> "Injured Innocence in white
> Fair but idiotic quite,"

only that Charles Reade will not allow his heroines to be brainless. That *sine qua non* of German romance (according to Bret Harte) is not a *sine qua non* for Charles Reade. Moreover, his innocents are as often in broadcloth and corduroys as in muslin; and one lays down his books with a sigh of regret that the world bears so little resemblance to the scenes of

these enchanting works, where vice is always vanquished and virtue victorious.

One closes the book; and half-an-hour after reading the last page one would be puzzled to give the name of one single character in the story. This is very strange: and one inquires, and marvels, why the people in these exciting tales are really of no more interest than the actors in the play-bill of a Drury Lane melodrama. One gets from the novel, as from the play, much interest, much profit, and many moments of excitement—and one has hardly the curiosity to remember, or even to ask, who the people may be.

There was another novelist of the nineteenth century who, like Charles Reade, revelled in detail—Anthony Trollope. It may well be asked why Anthony Trollope's minor characters are more easily remembered than the heroes of Charles Reade. Often as I have read the fight of the East Indiaman (in *Hard Cash*) with the pirates, I cannot remember the name of the indomitable captain or even the name of the victorious ship. For some reason the names of two quite unimportant Trollopian characters—Montgomerie Dobbs and Fowler Pratt—seem impossible to forget; and what is true of two is true of two hundred such. How is this? If it is a mere freak of memory it is not worth spending two minutes over, or two seconds: but it may be more than that. When Charles Reade tells us that he milks two hundred heterogeneous cows into one pail before he writes a novel he gives us our answer. To change the figure, and substitute one more manageable, a man may live, and write of, and out of, four or five lives, but assuredly not two hundred. Now, Trollope knew the life of London clubs because

he lived that life. He knew the hunting-field, and so could write of it, convincingly, in detail. It is to be observed, in passing, that wherever (as in the case of the House of Commons) he wrote of that of which he had no practical experience his work becomes noticeably blurred. Not that these characters were ever so shadowy as Charles Reade's, for the obvious reason that the Houses of Parliament are tenanted by people who lead the lives that Trollope led—only the conditions are strange.

Turning to Charles Reade, the reflection that immediately suggests itself is that Charles Reade was not a cutler, he was not a convict, he was not a merchant-captain, he was not a banker, he was not a diamond-miner, he was not a gold-digger. The one thing that Charles Reade was—a University Don—stood for a life in which he apparently took no interest at all, and did not attempt to describe—with the exception of using his knowledge of Oxford to introduce some boating incidents which are, presumably, quite accurate padding. The effect of this is twofold. Firstly, Trollope's detail was easily and vigorously handled; and secondly, his detail being completely under control, all the energy of his mind went to the elaboration of his characters, and they live. On the other hand, all the energy of Charles Reade's mind was exhausted (and no wonder!) by the tremendous effort of mastering and presenting his detail, and his characters must look out for themselves, with the natural result that they remain puppets.

There remains the soul of the man; and the soul of the man was great: he loved righteousness, and hated iniquity. For him, as for Trollope, life looked very black and white. From their point of view, it

was easy, instinctive even, for the good to play the man, and the good were rewarded; but the way of the transgressors was hard. This chess-board view of life was more marked in Reade's work than in Trollope's because Reade took himself more seriously. Trollope regarded himself solely as a craftsman, labouring honestly at a profitable trade. He likened himself to a bootmaker; continually turning out good work for sale, and not stopping to admire his own productions. "Stopping to admire himself" would perhaps have been Trollope's definition of a typical artist's attitude. Indeed, he was unjust to artists and unjust to himself; but in his rage at the nonsense talked in the name of art, he spurned a noble title which we might justly award him if respect for his memory did not restrain us. Charles Reade's attitude was markedly different. "Artist" would have struck him as too mean a title. "Reformer" would have been nearer the mark; though the rage of honesty, reinforced by the rage of the reformer, produced more the temper of the Apostle than the temper of the Novelist. It is as the Apostle, in fact, that we must regard Charles Reade if we would rightly understand him. We shall understand neither his twenty volumes of ingenious romance nor his one work of immortal merit if we regard him merely as the Novelist.

The "Tendenz-stück" was his ideal; and, carried away as he was by his ideal, he allowed nothing to interfere with the accurate presentation of his side of the question—not even the demands of the story. In this respect he was an even more earnest devotee of the Tendenz-stück than Charles Dickens himself; for it is quite possible to read Charles Dickens for the

real fun and excitement of the story; but Charles Reade will not permit that: the temper of the Apostle forbids all such trifling; and the eye of the reader must be fixed on the public grievance—be it fraudulent banking or a cruel prison system—from first to last. It is a veritable *tour de force* that he should so imperiously persist in this attitude and yet not exhaust the patience of his readers.

Charles Reade's style was very uneven. As a rule we find neither rhetoric nor music. We are gratified by a plain narrative prose, which is a capable vehicle for any incident and any piece of descriptive work. It is, however, disfigured here and there by wonderful grimaces which would be sternly corrected in a schoolgirl's exercise, and which are truly surprising in the work of an experienced scholar and author. Thus in *Put Yourself in his Place* we read: "'One piece of advice I can conscientiously give Mr. Little.' 'Yes, Papa.' 'And that is—TO INSURE HIS LIFE.'" Or, again, in *Hard Cash* we read: "While Dodd's eyes were staring almost out of his head at this deathblow to hope, Monk fired again; and just then a pale face came close to Dodd's, and a solemn voice whispered in his ear: 'Our ammunition is nearly done.'" Or, again, in *The Cloister and the Hearth:* "'Unhappy youth,' said Denys solemnly, 'the sum of thy troubles is this: thy fever is gone, and thy wound is healing. Sith so it is,' added he indulgently, 'I shall tell thee a little piece of news I had otherwise withheld.' 'What is it?' asked Gerard, sparkling with curiosity.

"'THE HUE AND CRY IS OUT AFTER US: AND ON FLEET HORSES.'"

Or, again, in *Foul Play:* "'He is gone—and we

are alone—on this island.' The man said this in one sense only; but the woman heard it in two.

"ALONE!"

With Charles Reade it is quite a habit to alter the type; and to rely on this device to produce the emphasis that ought to be produced by carefully chosen words and carefully constructed sentences. He is as dead as Mayne Reid to the deplorable injury that is thus wrought to his otherwise workmanlike prose.

There are other curiosities and vagaries. In *A Simpleton* we find four consecutive sentences without a verb, thus: "Person—straight, elastic, and rather tall. Mind—nineteen. Accomplishments—numerous; a poor French scholar, a worse German, a worse English, an admirable dancer, an inaccurate musician, a good rider, a bad draughtswoman, a bad hairdresser, at the mercy of her maid; a hot theologian, knowing nothing, a sorry accountant, no housekeeper, no sempstress, a fair embroideress, a capital geographer, and no cook. Collectively, viz. mind and body, the girl we kneel to."

He does not disdain the aid of quaint illustrations when he thinks that they will add force to his prose. Thus, in *It is never too late to Mend*, he ends the fifty-second chapter thus: "Would you behold this great discovery, the same in appearance and magnitude as it met the eyes of the first discoverers, picked with a knife from the bottom of a calabash, separated at last by human art and gravity's great law from the meaner dust it had lurked in for a million years?—Then turn your eyes hither, for here it is."

There follows, occupying a half-page of the book, the illustration of an open clasp-knife, the blade of

which is covered with specks of gold, ranging in size from a pin's head to a large pea.

Again, in *Love me little love me long*, he is anxious to give the reader the impression of a country squire in whose mind "the county" came first and "the country" next, while the world at large was of quite third-rate importance. He does this very amusingly by printing: "Could you have looked inside Mr. Fountain's head you would have seen ideas corresponding to the following diagrams." This brings us to the bottom of the page, and overleaf we encounter an outline "county," while underneath it are a map of "Britain" about one-fourth the size of "the county," and a globe illustrating "the world at large" about the size of a small pea.

This is very funny; but it is not prose. Moreover, Charles Reade did himself an injustice when he descended to these artifices; for he was perfectly capable —no man more so—of conveying, by legitimate means, whatever impression he desired to produce. Thus, in *Put Yourself in his Place*, he introduces the character of Guy Raby, whose mind was cast in the mould of Mr. Fountain's, and he draws the man, this "antique Tory squire," in two swift telling sentences. "He had a sovereign contempt for tradespeople, and especially for manufacturers. Any one of those numerous disputes between masters and mechanics, which distinguish British industry, might have been safely referred to him, for he abhorred and despised them both with strict impartiality."

This is admirable. Here we have "that extinct animal the Squire" in full length; with his noble and narrow qualities perfectly set forth. His courage, his impeccable honesty, his sagacity, his pride, his vigour,

are all given in one master-touch. This is much better than helping the story out with funny little thumb-nail sketches. Reade, however, had a Turner-like contempt for the conventions when he thought that he saw a short cut to his effect, and cared nothing for style except as a means to an end.

It seems quaint that one who went so boldly to his aim without thought of rules, should upon occasion disclose a sensitive artistic conscience. In his introduction in the *Autobiography of a Thief* we read: "A story within a story is a frightful flaw in art." Could one safely go so far as that? "The Baroni family" seems quite in place in *Tancred*, but perhaps that is an exception. The story within the story is undoubtedly to be deprecated, and it is quite in Charles Reade's manner to call it "a frightful flaw." Is it not, again, curious to read this from the hand of an author who wilfully disfigures his page with gigantic capitals—a trick which exasperates or amuses according to the temper of the reader; but which is assuredly a violation of the most elementary canons of literary art?

Here, however, we must recognise the fervour of the learned Apostle. Rules exist; and he knows them and bows to them — so long as he chooses. When he chooses to fling them to the winds he does so, and you must take his word for it that they serve no useful purpose: the man of learning merges in the Apostle.

Charles Reade was a prolific author. He did not, however, make his mark early in life like Lytton, who produced *Pelham* at the age of twenty-five; or Disraeli, who wrote *Vivian Grey* when he was twenty-one; or Charles Dickens, who was only twenty-four when *The Pickwick Papers* were published. Rather he belonged

to the class of studious, industrious authors whose minds mature late. Such were George Eliot, who published *Scenes from Clerical Life* at the age of thirty-nine; Anthony Trollope, whose first successful novel, published after several previous failures, did not appear till the year 1855, when he was forty years of age; and the great Thackeray, who was thirty-six before he was famous. At the age of thirty-eight Charles Reade made his first hit with *Peg Woffington*. From 1852 till the year of his death he produced (neglecting their chronological order of appearance): *Put Yourself in his Place*, *It is never too late to Mend*, *A Terrible Temptation*, *Love me little love me long*, *A Perilous Secret*, *A Simpleton*, *Peg Woffington*, *Foul Play*, *Hard Cash*, *The Autobiography of a Thief*, *Griffith Gaunt*, *Christie Johnstone*, *The Course of True Love never did run smooth*, *The Double Marriage*, *The Wandering Heir*, *A Woman-hater*, *Singleheart and Doubleface*, and *The Jilt;* all of which are probably forgotten. This is at the rate of one book for every eighteen months of his life, and represents a very considerable output.

Is it possible, one reflects, that a man may be so well read, so learned even, so industrious and so courageous, and yet produce nothing of first-rate excellence? Learning, industry, and courage are great endowments, and yet Reade possessed them all and something more. Perhaps I may be permitted to make one rather long extract from *It is never too late to Mend*. This is what Reade wrote of his own century:—

"God has been bountiful to the human race in this age. Most bountiful to Poets; most bountiful to all of us who have a spark of nobleness in ourselves, and so can see and revere at sight the truly grand and noble

(any snob can do this after it has been settled two hundred years by other minds that he is to do it). He has given us warlike heroes more than we can count—far less honour as they deserve; and valour as full of variety as courage in the 'Iliad' is monotonous—except when it takes to its heels.

"He has given us one hero, a better man than Hector or Achilles. For Hector ran away from a single man; this hero was never known to run away at all. Achilles was a better egotist than soldier; wounded in his personal vanity, he revenged himself, not on the man who had wronged him—Prudence forbade—but on the army and on his country. This antique hero sulked; my hero, deprived of the highest command, retained a higher still—the command that places the great of heart above all petty personal feeling. He was a soldier, and could not look from his tent on battle and not plunge into it. What true soldier ever could? He was not a Greek, but a Frenchman, and could not love himself better than his country. Above all, he was not Achilles, but Canrobert.

"He has given us to see Nineveh disinterred by an English hero. He has given us to see the North-West Passage forced, and winter bearded on his everlasting throne by another. (Is it the hero's fault if self and snowdrop-singing poetasters cannot see this feat with the eyes of Camoens?)

"He has given us to see Titans enslaved by man; Steam harnessed to our carriages and ships; Galvanism tamed into an alphabet—a Gamut, and its metal harp-strings stretched across the earth *malgré* mountains and the sea, and so men's minds defying the twin monsters Time and Space; and now, gold revealed in

the east and west at once, and so mankind first in earnest peopling the enormous globe. Yet old women and children of the pen say this is a bad, a small, a lifeless, an unpoetic age: and they are not mistaken.—For they lie.

"As only tooth-stoppers, retailers of conventional phrases, links in the great cuckoo-chain, universal pill-vendors, Satan, and ancient booksellers, ancient nameless hacks can lie, they lie.

"It is they who are *small-eyed.* Now, as heretofore, weaklings cannot rise high enough to take a bird's-eye view of their own age and calculate its dimensions.

"The age, smaller than epochs to come, is a giant compared with the past, and full of mighty materials for any great pen in prose or verse. My little friends, aged nineteen and downwards—fourscore and upwards—who have been lending your ears to the stale little cant of every age as chanted in this one by Buffo-Bombastes and other foaming-at-the-pen old women of both sexes—take by way of antidote to all that poisonous soul-withering drivel ten honest words.

"I say before heaven and earth that the man who could grasp the facts of this day and do an immortal writer's work by them, *i.e.* so paint them as a later age will be content to engrave them, would be the greatest writer ever lived: such is the force, weight, and number of the grand topics that lie this day on the world's face. I say that he who has eyes to see may now see greater and far more poetic things than human eyes have ever seen since our Lord and His Apostles and His miracles left the earth. It is very hard to write a good book or a good play, or to invent a good picture, and having invented, paint it. But

it always was hard, except to those — to whom it was impossible. Bunglers will not mend matters by blackening the great canvases they can't paint on, nor the impotent become males by detraction.

"Justice!

"When we write a story or sing a poem of the great nineteenth century, there is but one fear, not that our theme will be beneath us, but we miles beneath it; that we shall lack the comprehensive vision a man must have from heaven to catch the historical, the poetic, the lasting features of the Titan events that stride so swiftly past IN THIS GIGANTIC AGE."

It would be easy to say hard things of prose like this; but the somewhat lengthy passage is not set forth for the purpose of gibing at it. Rather let us see what is good in all this violent rhapsody with its concluding grimace. Well, it is clear that no man could write this who did not possess a spark of divine fire. These are the words of a man whose heart is aflame with generous enthusiasms; and, if only he can drag himself away from the Central Criminal Court with its fascinating horrors, and allow his soul to soar, we shall hold our breath as we watch its flight.

Once in his life did Charles Reade's soul burst its way through the prison gates of realism. In *The Cloister and the Hearth* it found expression in a work of orchestral magnificence.

It would be enough to say of this book that it possesses in ample measure all the faults of all his other books, and that those faults are of no more consequence to the story than the bubbles on the stream of a noble river. Strangely enough, *The*

Cloister and the Hearth is the song of a century—the fifteenth—whether Charles Reade meant it to be so or not. Much as he admired his own century, he could hardly hope that any artist would ever do for it what he himself did for the fifteenth. Over it all he casts a glory of light and love in which the story, no longer a panorama, moves like the epic it is. If we apply to it the homely test that we applied to *Hard Cash*, and inquire how much of it can we remember? the answer is, What detail do we forget? The sober life of sleepy little towns in Holland, the noisy paganism of Rome, the squalor of German inns, the grandeur of Duke Philip's court; Duke Philip himself, the adorable life-worn old Pontiff, the venomous Ghysbrecht van Swieten, Denys with his gallant *consigne*, Martin van Wittenhagen, the sober Richart, the jolly little dwarf, Cornelis and Sybrandt the traitors, the Princess Clælia, the austere Jerome, how many more and how much more has Charles Reade not made to live in this matchless romance?

It has been commented that the climax and anti-climax of *The Cloister and the Hearth* detract from its artistic merit. We will consider of that; but meanwhile, apart from the subtle human delight of the story, it is true that as regards sheer dramatic excitement the story is hard to beat for intensity and variety. The author showers upon us, with all the careless prodigality of genius, scene after scene, in country after country, Flanders, Burgundy, Germany, or Italy, any one of which would make the fortune of a short-story teller of to-day. It is not, therefore, a question whether this scene or that scene is inferior in dramatic interest to its predecessor; and so tends to produce a wearisome effect. Rather the story flows

in so full a stream that episodes are but as the glittering waves of which we do not concern ourselves to measure the size.

If we were to select two of the most dramatic movements of the story for the purpose of determining whether or no the author is given to anti-climax, our choice might perhaps fall upon the attempted suicide of Gerard, and the confession of the Princess. The saving of Gerard from drowning is a wonderful episode. None the less it is a question whether in dramatic intensity it must not yield the first place to the confession of the Princess; although everything pales before the tremendous climax of the last lines of the book. After love and adventure and joyous life and stress, the story plunges into gloom of tragic intensity. We are crushed with grief as we read; the very sun seems chill in the heavens; joy is to be no more known in the world. I know of no parallel in fiction to the stroke of genius with which Charles Reade completes his epic. Even his detestable change of type cannot blur its magnificence.

It even seems (for once) to be appropriate. The pomp of larger type is like the (otherwise meaningless) pomp of heraldic costume which we cannot dissociate from the trumpeters who announce the King in his glory. From the depths of our woe and our abasement we are aroused by these tremendous words of promise and consolation—

Hæc est parva domus natus quâ magnus
Erasmus.

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JAN 31 1933

SEP 3 1

MAY 21 1941

MAY 5 1933

10Dec'57G

REC'D LD

NOV 3 1933

DEC 11 195

25Jan'5

REC'D LD

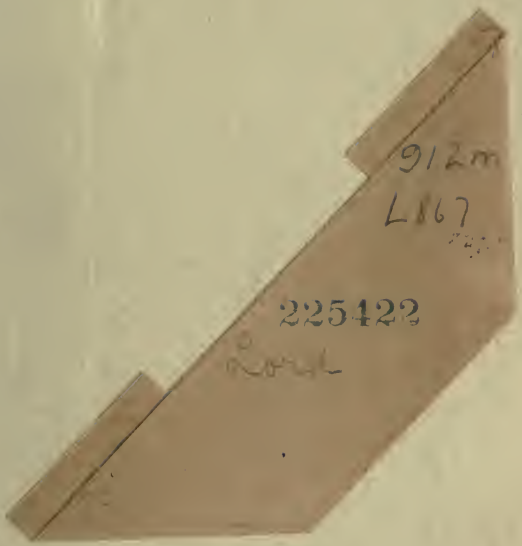
NOV 18 '35

JAN 11 195

APR 13 1942 P

MAY 14 1942 E

YB 31388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